

**"Vietnam Is Fighting for Us:"  
French Identities and the U.S. - Vietnam War, 1965-1973**

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of History.

Chapel Hill  
2009

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## **ABSTRACT**

BETHANY S. KEENAN: "Vietnam Is Fighting for Us:" French Identities and the U.S. -  
Vietnam War, 1965-1973  
(Under the direction of Dr. Donald Reid and Dr. Lloyd Kramer)

My dissertation, "Vietnam Is Fighting for Us," examines French reactions to the U.S.- Vietnam War to determine how French national identities emerged in the key post-colonial era of 1965-1973. By an analysis of social movements and political groups on the right and the left, my work illuminates the dialogic interactions of past understanding and present action which shaped France in the Fifth Republic. The study of French reactions to the war challenges current historiography on France in the pre-1968 era and rewrites our understanding of how the riots of May '68 emerged, as well as situating post-'68 political and social shifts within an international framework. Through its focus, the dissertation clearly brings out the contention within France over French identities and France's role in the world, while highlighting France's move from a power at a loss without its colonies to a nation with a new mission as international mediator and ally to countries undergoing revolutionary change.

To Sean, with all my love  
and to Delaney, with all my joy

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I could not have written this dissertation without the help of numerous generous individuals and organizations, all of whom I would like to take the opportunity to thank here.

The following funding allowed me to travel to France for my research: the Mowry Dissertation Fellowship and the Raymond Faherty Research Grant for Military History from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill's History Department; the Smith Graduate Research Grant from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill's Graduate School; the Doctoral Research Travel Award from the University Center for International Studies at UNC; and finally the Foreign Language Area Studies Academic Year Dissertation Award from the University Center for International Studies at UNC. I was also able to dedicate myself full-time to writing my dissertation thanks to the Doris Quinn Dissertation Completion Fellowship from the Quinn Foundation and to the University of North Carolina's Graduate School Dissertation Completion Fellowship.

In the course of my research, many provided me with help and information. The librarians and archivists at the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine; the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; the Centre des Archives Contemporaines; the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire; and the Centre d'Histoire Sociale du XXe Siècle all offered essential finding aid and guidance. Dr. Nicolas Pas shared his dissertation and his interview notes for people such as Laurent Schwartz with

me. In addition, Nicole Simone-Cortès, Daniel Hémary, and Jean-Michel Krivine all graciously shared documents from their personal archives with me. They, as well as Raymond Aubrac, Pierre Brocheux, Charles Fourniau, Camille Galic, Marcel-Francis Kahn, Alain Krivine, and Henri Weber, spoke with me about their Vietnam War activities. While I was unable to use their oral histories due to bureaucratic complications, I deeply appreciate the time they spent with me and hope to work with them in the future.

Many at the University of North Carolina and elsewhere offered valuable insights and critiques to this project at all of its stages. This department has been welcoming and supporting since the day I arrived, and the dissertation period proved no different. Judith Bennett oversaw my work on the prospectus, providing the sharp commentary and great humor needed to get the project beyond idea form into working shape. Pam Lach and Sarah Shurts dutifully read multiple early brainstorms. Sarah also provided help and enthusiastic cheerleading as I moved forward in my research and writing. Lisi Lotz spent a semester reading away as I revised the Russell Tribunal chapter over and over. The members of my dissertation committee, Lloyd Kramer, Jay Smith, Michael Hunt, and Michael Seidman, gave me thoughtful comments on the final draft. I'd like to thank them for a provocative, inspiring defense that was the perfect cap to a great time as a graduate student at UNC.

Two scholars with no connections to me or my school stepped up and became invaluable resources as I worked through the dissertation. Dr. David Schalk responded to a request to chair a panel with a regretful no, but with sincere interest in my work. He has since offered writing commentary, connections, and general academic guidance. I deeply

admire his work and appreciate the time he has given to me. Dr. Pierre Journoud met with me in France and helped me out immeasurably. He provided me with contacts in France, shared his own research with me, and sent me his dissertation as soon as he himself had defended. I hope that my work can be seen as a complement to his own excellent project.

There is no way I could have completed this project without the support of my writing group, the "Fantastic Four." Greg Kaliss, Patrick O'Neil, and Blake Slonecker gave me the push I needed to get over the last hurdles. Their questions and suggestions improved my writing immensely. Patrick and Blake also helped by volunteering to watch my beautiful daughter, Delaney, so I could work; Blake gave her a best friend in his gorgeous girl, Miriam, and Patrick became her beloved "Uncle Paddy." I also need to thank Greg and Patrick for the countless hours they spent explaining basketball to me, enabling me to become a true Tar Heel. All three have been, more than writing partners, good friends, and I appreciate them more than they know.

Throughout my graduate school career, Don Reid has been a tireless source of support, critique and good advice. He shepherded me through the MA process and stood by patiently as I worked out my ideas about what I wanted to do for a dissertation. He read draft upon draft, frequently returning them with excellent comments within a twenty-four hour period. His sense of humor kept me smiling at all times. As I move on to being a professor myself, he will be my model in all aspects. I can only hope that I will someday be half the historian and advisor that he is. I offer my thanks here, knowing that I've come nowhere near saying how grateful I truly am.

I also want to thank my family, without whom I could never have done this. My parents, Judy Keenan and Joe Keenan, always believed in me and encouraged me to

follow my dreams. My brothers, Shane and Spencer, cheered me on and never failed to let me know they were proud of me - I am proud of them as well, and not the least for giving me such excellent sister-in-laws as Jess and Kelly. My sister-in-law Jen offered endless support, and my in-laws, Peter and Nancy McNulty, always gave their all, even coming down to watch Delaney for a week so I could put the finishing touches on. I am blessed to have them all with me.

My greatest thanks goes to my husband, Sean. Sean uprooted his life and cheerfully followed me to Chapel Hill so I could pursue my dream, and in our time here took some of the world's most thankless jobs (and some quite nice ones!) in order to support us as we worked. He provided me with numerous crazy tech toys to keep me amused as I worked, saved my laptop from sure death on several occasions, and did everything in his power to make my life easier. He never doubted me, no matter how dark I thought things looked. He is, as he has been for thirteen years now, my best friend. Along with his love, he gave me my daughter Delaney, who has been the light of my life since she was born on July 17, 2007. While she will not remember Mommy writing this at all, Mommy will always remember her being there and how she reminded me of what it was I was working for. Delaney and Sean are my joy, my reason for being, and it is to them I dedicate this dissertation.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations .....	x
Introduction .....	1
Chapter One: "Flattering the Little Sleeping Rooster": The French, De Gaulle, and the Vietnam War in 1965.....	17
Chapter Two: For Whom "The Heart of the French People Beats": Unity, Division and the Development of Vietnam War Protest Groups in France, 1966 .....	48
Chapter Three: "Today We Must Clearly Take a Stand:" The Growing Radicalization of the Vietnam War Movement in France, 1967.....	96
Chapter Four: "At the Crossroads of Culture and Militancy:" The Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire and Armand Gatti's <i>V Comme Vietnam</i> on Tour, January - June 1967.....	148
Chapter Five: "Against the Crime of Silence:" French Intellectual Protestors and the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, 1966-1967.....	196
Chapter Six: "La France S'Ennuie"? Vietnam War Protests and the "Events" of February, March, and April, 1968.....	229
Chapter Seven: The <i>Retour à l'Hexagone</i> : May '68 and the Decline of the Vietnam War Movement in France.....	267
Conclusion.....	306
Bibliography.....	316

### **List of Abbreviations**

BDIC	Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
CAC	Centre des Archives Contemporaines
CIU	Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire
CHS	Centre d'Histoire Sociale du XX Siècle
CVN	Comité Vietnam National
CVB	Comité Vietnam de base
JCR	Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire
PACS	Paris American Committee to Stopwar
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PSU	Parti Socialiste Unifié
SFIO	Section Française de l'International Ouvrière
SNESup	Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur
UEC	Union des Etudiants Communistes
UNEF	Union Nationale des Etudiants de France

## Introduction

On November 28, 1966, five thousand people crowded into the Mutualité's large amphitheatre in Paris to hear speakers on the Vietnam War. With famous names such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Laurent Schwartz, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet on the roster, the draw was such that activists had been queueing up to get in since six that evening.<sup>1</sup> The "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam" protest meeting offered an intellectual, cultural and artistic smorgasboard meant to bring anti-war activities in France to the next level. Acclaimed artist Max Ernst had drawn the poster for the meeting, which hung in the room.<sup>2</sup> In addition to their choice of four colloquiums on topics such as "The Anti-Imperialist Struggle in the World" and "Gaullism and Vietnam," participants also heard songs by Jacques Martin and Pia Colombo and saw the world premiere of Wilfred Burchett's latest film on the war. But the centerpiece of the evening came when Jean-Paul Sartre approached the podium to give his speech. To "frenetic" applause, Sartre told the assembled crowd "We want peace in Vietnam, but not just any peace. This peace must end with the recognition of Vietnam's independence and sovereignty." He encouraged the French to move past "moral" support for the Vietnamese into "political" action. "This is how we need to be in solidarity with the Vietnamese people," Sartre explained. "Their fight is ours. It is the fight against American hegemony, against American imperialism.

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<sup>1</sup> "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde*, 30 November 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout Compte Fait* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 465.

The defeat of the Vietnamese people," Sartre argued, "would politically be our defeat, the defeat of all free people. Because Vietnam is fighting for us."<sup>3</sup>

Sartre's fervent belief in the deep importance of the Vietnam War played out across the French political spectrum. Some, like Jean Terrell of the Union Nationale des Etudiants de France (French National Students' Union, or UNEF), similarly saw France's support of the Vietnamese as essential to a fight against imperialist powers. As Terrel noted, "If our eyes are fixed on Vietnam, it's because it is the nervepoint of the people's fight against oppression and exploitation."<sup>4</sup> The Communist Jacques Madaule proclaimed that "Vietnam is fighting for all people. Its victory would be that of all people[.]"<sup>5</sup> On the other side of the political fence, the far-right writers at *Rivarol* proclaimed that "this fight concerns us all" because "the destiny of the entire Western world is playing out at the Cape of Camau in the Red River Delta."<sup>6</sup> President De Gaulle had also thrown himself wholly into the battle, working to bring about negotiations, taking his most virulent stand at his famous speech at Phnom Penh in September of 1966.

But French reactions to the Vietnam War were more than just reflections on the international situation or sentiments for or against American power. For the French, reacting to the Vietnam War provided a means to define their place in the world. Having emerged from the crisis situations of World War II and the Algerian War, France came into the mid-sixties ready to recreate itself. The Vietnam War offered an important space

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<sup>3</sup> "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde*, 30 November 1966.

<sup>4</sup> "Explication de vote de Jean Terrel, président de l'UNEF," *Tribune Socialiste* 14 October 1966.

<sup>5</sup> "Manifestation place de la Bastille en faveur de la paix," *Le Monde* 13 December 1966.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Langlois, "Avec d'autres moyens, c'est la relève de nos Légionnaires que les Marines ont prise au Vietnam: leur combat nous concerne tous," *Rivarol* 15 September 1966.

for Frenchmen of all political stripes to discuss France's role in the world. Although opposition to the war was nearly unanimous in France, the war raised new questions about the country's global role and frequently brought out longstanding internal divisions. The ongoing dialogue and debate about the war thus had as much to do with French identities, international and internal, past and present, as it did with the United States or Vietnam.

This dissertation studies the activities of four French groups -- the far right, the far left, the French Communist Party, and the Gaullist government -- around the Vietnam War as a way of providing necessary insight into important elements of France and French identity at a key post-colonial moment, the time period between 1965 and 1973. Until recently, little secondary literature addressed the question of France's interactions with the U.S. - Vietnam War. While a plethora of books has sprung up around the U.S. phase of the Vietnam War, most works focus on either American or Vietnamese perspectives and neglect France. Studies of the diplomatic negotiations leading to the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, for example, rarely mention France or French leaders, relegating the major players to a few pages of their story and deeming de Gaulle little more than, to quote one work, "a major irritant."<sup>7</sup> Many still agree with political scientist Marianna P. Sullivan's 1978 assessment that France's Vietnam policy stemmed from "the

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<sup>7</sup> For information on the Peace Accords and diplomatic relations see, among others: Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Allan E. Goodman, *The Lost Peace: America's Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), revised for the Institute of East Asian Studies as an Indochina Research Monograph under the title *The Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). The quote comes from Gardner and Gittinger's *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, 283.

nature of an alliance relationship between an ascending superpower and a declining middle power," a view which limits France's actions to frustration over its "impotence."<sup>8</sup> Such denigration of France's role is telling of how French attempts were perceived by the United States, but neglects the central role that the Vietnam War played for French leaders, both intellectual and political.

Historians of France, in turn, have neglected to recognize the validity of Arthur Marwick's statement that "[t]here can be no study of the sixties without consideration of the complex repercussions of the Vietnam war."<sup>9</sup> For some areas, notably cultural history, the lacuna in studies of the sixties and the war arose from a reluctance to study a time still so chronologically near.<sup>10</sup> In general, however, the historiographical gap came from a tendency to focus on the events of the Algerian War, which spilled over from the fifties until its end in 1962, and the uprisings of May 1968. Presentations of the Vietnam War lodged it firmly in the domain of foreign policy, as part of de Gaulle's plan to restore France to its former state of "grandeur," while additionally connecting it to attempts of de Gaulle to correct perceived slights against him such as Yalta.<sup>11</sup> While historians

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<sup>8</sup> Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 142.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c 1958 - c 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, "La France des sixties revisitée," *Vingtième Siècle* 69 (2001): 118. Sirinelli addresses in particular those who study *mentalités*, noting that "The analysis of communal perceptions and shared sensibilities [...] seemed to only be applicable to societies geographically or chronologically removed from our own."

<sup>11</sup> See for example Anne Sa'a'dah, "Idées simples and idées fixes: De Gaulle, The United States, and Vietnam," in *De Gaulle and the United States: A Centennial Reappraisal*, ed. Robert O. Paxton and Nicholas Wahl (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 295-316. Vincent Jauvert's book, *L'Amérique contre de Gaulle: Histoire secrète, 1961-1969* (Paris: Seuil, 2000) provides an interesting take on French-American relations in this period. Jauvert, however, sensationalizes his usage of recently declassified materials in his recreation of U.S. - de Gaullian relations. While his idea of "l'Amérique contre de Gaulle" carries the antagonism a bit far, the documents reveal that from the get-go, French and American views on how to act in Indochina

recognized that Vietnam garnered large amounts of attention from the French in general, their presentation of the time between the end of the Algerian War in 1962 and 1968 created the impression that for most, interest in the Vietnam War was a way to pass the time until life at home kicked up again. This is most evident in histories of modern intellectuals. Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli present interest in Vietnam as simply part of a lost-cause search for third-world revolutionary forces in their work, *Les Intellectuels en France de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*. Michel Winock deems Vietnam as an "exotic" contrast to the "*popote* [boring, or stay-at-home] domestic affairs in his study, *Le Siècle des Intellectuels*.<sup>12</sup> What these works have failed to recognize is that the focus on the "exotic" aspects of the Vietnam War did not exist separate from "*popote*" domestic concerns. Rather, the two were intimately joined. The "complex repercussions of the Vietnam War," as Marwick phrased it, resonated for France both at home and abroad. Because of France's colonial past and France's current world status, looking out involved simultaneously looking in.

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were at an impasse. Jean LaCouture, in his article "De Gaulle et l'Indochine," (in *La politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle*, ed. Élie Barnavi and Saül Friedländer [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985]), traces out de Gaulle's evolving views on Indochina from its time as a French colony to the American war. Lacouture also argues that de Gaulle used Indochina to challenge perceived old slights and avenge an "old bitterness" at seeing the U.S. take over in Indochina. (Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Ruler, 1945-1970*, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991], 400. Philippe Devillers gives a nice analysis of the Phnom Penh speech in his article, "Le discours de Phnom Penh," where he argues that de Gaulle uses Indochina as a means of challenging American hegemony. Philippe Devillers, "Le discours de Phnom Penh," in *De Gaulle en son siècle: Tome VI*, ed. Institut Charles de Gaulle (Paris: Plon, 1992), 472-476. In a contemporary article on de Gaulle's Vietnam War policy, Devillers fixes the interactions within French-American relations with no reflection on domestic France. Philippe Devillers, "La Politique Française et la Seconde Guerre Du Vietnam." *Politique Étrangère* 32: 6 (1967): 569-604. Edward Haley, in his article "Alliés et Adversaires: De Gaulle et les Etats-Unis de 1958 à 1969," argues that de Gaulle's primary motivation was to return France to its previous standing (and not, as some would say, inherent anti-Americanism). Edward Haley, "Alliés et Adversaires: De Gaulle et les Etats-Unis de 1958 À 1969," in *De Gaulle en Son Siècle*, 298-309.

<sup>12</sup> Winock, *Le Siècle des Intellectuels* (Paris: Seuil, 1997): 689. Interestingly, the Vietnam War appears sparingly even in works related precisely to French intellectuals' involvement with the United States; see notably Jean-Philippe Mathy, *Extrême-Occident: French Intellectuals and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Slowly, historians have begun serious work on French reactions to the Vietnam War. In his brilliant work on intellectual petitioning during the twentieth century, Jean-François Sirinelli notes that "French intellectual debate was largely placed for many years under the sign of Vietnam, and the problem was essential [...] for a number of *clercs*; what's more, a new generation awoke to politics in the cadre of this anti-imperialist fighting."<sup>13</sup> Sirinelli's central concern lies with the contradiction between intellectual *engagement* and attention to true situations: the continual approval in intellectual protests for communist Vietnam without apparent consideration of what that government entailed. The intensity of involvement in Vietnam, he claims, perhaps explains the problems intellectuals encountered in the 1970s.<sup>14</sup>

In a footnote, Sirinelli remarked that "one could do a great study on the different opposition movements to the Vietnam War, and notably on the creation in fall 1966 of the Comité Vietnam National."<sup>15</sup> His challenge was taken up by several French historians. Sabine Rousseau undertook an analysis of Christian groups who protested the Vietnam War, examining how their understanding of Christian responsibility trumped a critique of imperialism as the motivating factor for their interventions.<sup>16</sup> Christelle Gautran wrote her master's thesis on French participation in the Russell Tribunal,

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et Passions Françaises: Manifestes et pétitions au XXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), 253. Sirinelli's work focuses largely on left-wing intellectuals; he notes, however, that while left-wing intellectuals predominantly guided the debates on Vietnam, right-wing intellectuals also opposed the war (244-45).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-61.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 246 fn 2.

<sup>16</sup> Sabine Rousseau, "Des Chrétiens français face à la guerre du Vietnam (1966)," *Vingtième Siècle* 47 (1995); *La Colombe et le Napalm : Des chrétiens français contre les guerres d'Indochine et du Vietnam, 1945-1975* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002). I have chosen not to do an in-depth examination of French Christians in this dissertation, as their primary motivation was ecumenical, as Rousseau shows.



providing in particular an informative overview of interactions between the French Foreign Ministry and the American Embassy over the desire to hold the Tribunal on French soil.<sup>17</sup> Nicolas Pas followed Jean-François Sirinelli's suggestion the most closely and undertook a study of the various *Comités Vietnam* of the sixties, examining how the war played a catalysing role in French life and contrasting the different approaches -- largely age-based -- between the various "comités." By far the most detailed work on the French anti-war groups, Pas' work demonstrated how the French far left used their Vietnam War protests to establish a French left separate from the hegemony of the French Communist Party.<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, historians have also re-established the linkage between Vietnam and the coming of May. Although there has always been awareness that protestors in May had a past connected to Vietnam -- Adrien Dansette, who wrote one of the earliest histories on May in 1971, noted that Vietnam War protests allowed French students to "take the decisive step" in their radicalization before May broke out -- no in-depth study of the connection between Vietnam and May existed.<sup>19</sup> Pas' dissertation broke ground, and Laurent Jalabert's article, "Aux origines de la génération '68," brought anti-war activity to the fore, explaining how involvement in early 1960s protests against the

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<sup>17</sup> Christelle Gautran, *Le tribunal Russell : tribunal international des crimes de guerre américains au Vietnam* (PhD diss., Institut d'Etudes Politiques, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Nicolas Pas, "Six heures pour le Vietnam," *Histoire des Comités Vietnam français 1965-1968*. *Révue Historique* 302.1 (2000); "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche française sur la guerre du Vietnam 1965-1968," PhD diss, Institut d'Etudes Politiques Paris, 1998. I am extremely grateful to Nicolas Pas for providing me with a copy of his dissertation for use in my research, as well as copies of several of his interview notes.

<sup>19</sup> Dansette, *Mai '68* (Paris: Plon, 1971): 71.. Dansette's acknowledgement is just a very brief mention, with no real elucidation; he also briefly addresses the connection between the Maoists and the *Comités Vietnam de Base* on pages 47-48. Similarly, Laurent Joffrin's history of May '68, *Mai '68: Histoire des événements*, mentions that anti-war protests allowed French students to "take their classes [in activism]," but does not go into depth at all. Joffrin, *Mai '68: Histoire des événements* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 39.

Vietnam War laid the foundations for action in May '68 by providing students with activist training.<sup>20</sup> Other historians have also expounded upon the ties between Vietnam War protests and May. Jean-François Sirinelli, in his recent book *Les Baby-Boomers*, builds on Pas' work, arguing that anti-war activity provided students with the bridge between anti-colonialism in Algeria to the anti-imperialism that would motivate them in May.<sup>21</sup> Michael Seidman's excellent work, *The Imaginary Revolution*, emphasizes the role Vietnam had in energizing students before May.<sup>22</sup> Kristin Ross, in *May '68 and its Afterlives*, also places Vietnam as the starting spark for May and similarly argues that Vietnam allowed students to move from the Algerian War to a larger fight. While Ross places too much emphasis on the influence of French Maoists, to the detriment of her presentation of other protesting groups, she nonetheless correctly highlights the importance of anti-war activity to the formation of the May generation.<sup>23</sup>

Although works on students and the far left dominate, historians have also begun to approach the Vietnam War's effect on other members of French society. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse's edited volume, *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe*, offered up numerous strong articles examining the effect of the war on multiple countries in Europe. The articles on France included Marc Lazar's study of the French Communist Party, examining how the PCF used Vietnam as an attempt to establish its anti-imperial stance and to keep down the far left, as well as Maurice Vaïsse's interesting study of de Gaulle's evolving views on policy and Laurent Cesari's article on the Pompidou

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<sup>20</sup> Laurent Jalabert, "Aux origines de la génération 68: les étudiants français et la guerre du Vietnam," *Vingtième Siècle* 55 (1997): 69-81.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les baby-boomers: Une Génération, 1945-1969* (Paris: Fayard, 2003): 242-243.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, (New York: Berghan Books, 2004): 36-7.

<sup>23</sup> Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 80-81.

government's attempt to continue de Gaulle's general Vietnam policy without the accompanying struggle for grandeur.<sup>24</sup> By far the most comprehensive work on France and the Vietnam War, however, is Pierre Journoud's recently completed dissertation, "Les relations franco-américaines à l'épreuve du Vietnam entre 1954 et 1975. De la défiance dans la guerre à la coopération pour la paix." A study of French and American diplomatic interactions over the Indochinese and Vietnam Wars, Journoud's work provides an in-depth overview of how French and American policies towards Indochina evolved over time, highlighting the roles of de Gaulle and his foreign ministry. Meticulously researched in both French and American archives, the study brings new insight into how the war affected transatlantic relations and shaped French governmental ideas.<sup>25</sup>

While these works have contributed valuable information to understanding the importance of the Vietnam War to France, they are limited in their contributions because they tend to focus on one set of political actors. Studies which concentrate on one group miss the dynamic interplay of competing views which fueled debates on identity during this time.<sup>26</sup> In best evaluating how Vietnam War protests affected France's development, it is the differences of opinion, not the similarities, which offer the most insight. Michael

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<sup>24</sup> Marc Lazar, "Le Parti communiste français et l'action de solidarité avec le Vietnam" in *La Guerre du Vietnam et L'Europe, 1963-1973*, ed. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse (Paris: Bruyant, 2003): 241-252; Maurice Vaïsse, "De Gaulle et la guerre du Vietnam: la difficulté d'être Cassandre," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973*: 169-178; and Laurent Cesari, "Le président Georges Pompidou et la guerre du Vietnam, 1969-1974," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973*: 179-192.

<sup>25</sup> Journoud, "Les relations franco-américaines à l'épreuve du Vietnam entre 1954 et 1975. De la défiance dans la guerre à la coopération pour la paix," (PhD diss, Paris I-Sorbonne, 2008). I am extremely grateful to Pierre Journoud for providing me with a copy of his dissertation.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Journoud's dissertation has an outstanding chapter on domestic protests, which brings out some of the domestic debates: Journoud, 1090-1167. However, in keeping with the primary focus of his dissertation, his examination of Gaullist-protestors interactions centered around how these conflicts played into French-American relations, not domestic French relations.

Seidman, for example, is correct to state that "Antifascism and anti-imperialism offered common ground among *groupuscules* sparring over leadership and ideological dominance of the future working-class revolution. Even Communists were able to participate in the anti-American and pro-Vietcong campaigns."<sup>27</sup> But as my dissertation shows, divisions between the far left and the Communists, and among the far left themselves, made unity tenuous at best, and the arguments among the groups show their varying ideas over how France should act. The left additionally needs to be considered in its relations with the Gaullist government. Laurent Jalabert's claim that the student protestors "showed a certain absence when dealing with national political authorities" and that "there was never a question of de Gaulle [or] of the government [...] in their demands" misses the fact that the anti-war left consistently, if with difficulty, used the government's stance on the war to better outline their own.<sup>28</sup> Finally, and perhaps most importantly, studies of this key time period need to emphasize the importance of the far right to dialogues of national identity. Jean-François Sirinelli proclaimed that "lifelessness loomed large on the right," on the war, thus explaining the heavily skewed French stance against the Americans.<sup>29</sup> But while far right-wing activity did not reach the levels it had during the Algerian War, it still featured strongly in protest actions and political motions around the war, and interactions with the far right motivated actors on the left. Studying far-right reactions to the Vietnam War is essential because it once again places the far right into national dialogue in the years following the Evian Agreements. .

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<sup>27</sup> Seidman, 35. Seidman raises the issue of unity here in the context of the Union Nationale des Etudiants de France, but as will be shown throughout the dissertation, the UNEF more frequently encountered conflict than cohesion in its attempts to pursue anti-war activities.

<sup>28</sup> Joffrin, 79.

<sup>29</sup> Sirinelli, *Les Baby-Boomers*, 246-247.

By examining the varying reactions to the Vietnam war and the interplay between them, my dissertation will demonstrate the multi-faceted national identity construction underway at this key moment in French post-colonial history, while also shedding light on the importance of social movements to the construction of national identity, and on the international repercussions of intra-national conflicts. Although most nationalists argue for a single definition of national identity to describe their country, the construction of national identity is never a singular enterprise. Rather, it is the result of multiple voices speaking at once, drawing on similar contexts and historical precedents, and arguing and agreeing with each other as they attempt to shape the meaning of their nation. This polyphonic, dialogic approach means that events and reactions need to be considered as part of a larger text of national dialogue.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, identity acquisition needs to consider by history more than solely as a context, instead examining the development of identities as historical events themselves. In the case of France, this means evaluating reactions to the American War in Vietnam with an awareness of France's recovery from the material and moral devastation of World War II, its lowered circumstances in a world dominated by the Cold War, and its colonial past, both in Indochina and Algeria, along with internal divisions in French political and intellectual circles. By moving beyond the idea of French national re-creation as a Gaullist project locked within the contours of the Cold War hegemony, my dissertation reveals that the attempts to decide French identity

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<sup>30</sup> In this conceptualization of national identity creation, I draw heavily on M. M. Bakhtin's ideas. Bakhtin's theories of polyphonics and dialogics evoke the interconnectedness of ideas without removing these ideas from their historical context. As he noted, "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated - overpopulated - with the intentions of others." M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 294.

resulted from the efforts and interaction of multiple social movements in French society, inspired by the past and the present, simultaneously on the right and on the left.

While identity formation is typically considered a cultural event, my dissertation demonstrates that political debates and actions are also central to identity constructs. For the French, the Vietnam War served in debate less as an act of violence to reflect on, than as the floating signifier which allowed them to discuss the issues of concern to the French people, most notably the overarching question of what France's national identity - its role in the world -- would be following the loss of Algeria in 1962. Yet while French national identity acted as the umbrella for the debate, providing the contemporary context, the historical touchpoints, and the primary question for all, those discussing Vietnam in the mid-sixties also debated other elements of their identity as well. In the following chapters, I discuss generational identity, internal political party identity, intellectual identity, and artistic identity. Moreover, the dissertation's chronological scope allows the reader to follow as French identities evolve from a sense of general powerlessness pre-1968, to a feeling of regained French action in the post-68 period. The political discussions and maneuvers around the Vietnam War played a strong role in helping this identity evolution along.

Chapter One, "'Flattering the Little Sleeping Rooster': The French, De Gaulle, and the Vietnam War in 1965," uses the lens of the 1965 French presidential campaign to examine emerging views about the Vietnam War in France. First establishing the strong stand de Gaulle had already made against the Vietnam War by 1965, I then move to an examination of the French left and the French far right's rhetoric about the war as they campaigned against him. While the French far right's support for the American war effort

easily differentiated them from de Gaulle and allowed them to continue past grudges against him from the French colonial era, the French left faced a greater challenge because their anti-war stance largely appeared to mirror what de Gaulle had already said. Tracing developments throughout the year, I show how the far right and the left attempted to use Vietnam to counter de Gaulle's power in France and to argue for their own concept of post-colonial France's role in the world.

Chapter Two, "For Whom 'The Heart of the French People Beats': Unity, Division and the Development of Vietnam War Protest Groups in France, 1966," studies the growing activism in France, in particular the creation of groups such as the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire, the Comité Vietnam National, and Occident. Highlighting the move away from protests centered around political parties, the developing challenge to the French, and the battles between the left and the far right, I show how Vietnam War protests contributed to the rise of increasingly radical viewpoints and increased expectations of violence. Chapter Two also demonstrates how these protests continued the theme of questioning France's past and present, as well as challenging de Gaulle's standing in France.

Chapter Three, "'Today We Must Clearly Take a Stand:' The Growing Radicalization of the Vietnam War Movement in France, 1967," closely examines five significant protests over the course of 1967, the most active year for Vietnam-related activities in France. Focusing heavily on the growing splits on the left, not only between the far left and the PCF, but also amongst the far left with the introduction of the Maoist Comités Vietnam de Base, this chapter also shows how, as protests intensified, protestors began to direct their attention more and more to French-specific issues. Protests such as

those organized around Vice President Hubert Humphrey's visit to Paris in April 1967 gave activists the chance to directly challenge de Gaulle's presentation of France to the world. As the central international issue of the day, the Vietnam War offered French activists a key way of addressing their concerns about France's future.

Chapter Four, "'At the Crossroads of Culture and Militancy:' The Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire and Armand Gatti's *V Comme Vietnam* on Tour, January - June 1967," offers a literary interlude through a protest case-study. An in-depth analysis of the organization and presentation of Armand Gatti's play, *V Comme Vietnam*, as a protest-on-tour for the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire, the chapter explores the questions of how to protest which plagued the left, while additionally highlighting the continuing battle for French intellectual identity which the play brought to the fore. By showcasing both the actions undertaken to get the play on the road, as well as the resultant debate over the play's meaning and effect, the chapter brings out the effects of the Vietnam War on French culture and French militancy.

Chapter Five, "'Against the Crime of Silence:' French Protestors and the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, 1966-1967," is another case study, this time of French involvement in Bertrand Russell's international war crimes tribunal, intended to put the United States on trial for war crimes committed in Vietnam. As well-known French intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre worked on the Tribunal, they drew upon their past protest experience in Algeria to justify their involvement, repeatedly referencing France's history. Moreover, a clash between Sartre and de Gaulle, who revoked the Tribunal's permission to hold their meetings in France, brought to the fore issues over how French national identity could be presented to the rest of the world. During the Tribunal itself,



the divide between Sartre's view and that of young activists highlighted the growing divide in beliefs on how protest -- or revolution -- should function, providing indications of the splits which would emerge in May 1968.

Chapter Six, "'La France S'Ennuie'"? Vietnam War Protests and the "Events" of February, March and April, 1968," takes a close look at the early months of 1968, leading up to the outbreak of the May events. Building off Pas and Jalabert's contention that Vietnam War protests were essential in forming May militants, I further argue that Vietnam War protests also created the atmosphere of expected violence which allowed May to happen. Moving beyond acknowledgement of the role of Vietnam in the formation of the March 22nd movement, I examined how Vietnam played into protest activities right up to and including the outbreak of riots in the Sorbonne. Most importantly, I emphasize the role of the right in group interactions at this time, reinserting them into the creation of this seminal French event.

Chapter Seven, "The *Retour à l'Hexagone*: May '68 and the Decline of the Vietnam War Movement in France," studies the changes to Vietnam War protests during May 1968 and in its aftermath, up to the 1973 peace talks. While Vietnam had strongly motivated activists prior to May, their attention shifted homeward once events began -- even though peace talks started in Paris at the same time. After a presentation of how interest in Vietnam waned during May, I evaluate the shifts in Vietnam War activism among the four major groups over the next five years. I conclude that the French turn homewards represents the culmination of a reconceptualization of French identity, and that the Vietnam War continues to provide a key reference point for their contemporary ideas on France. Arguing that the Gaullist conception of France as a "capital of peace"

becomes dominant, I nonetheless show that the far right and far left continue to proffer competing ideas of French identity, all of which draw in part from their experiences protesting the Vietnam War.

Throughout the late sixties and early seventies, the Vietnam War provided the French with the means to debate key issues of national identity, as well as the experience and expectations which made nation-wide impact in May of 1968. By studying how the French reacted to the Vietnam War, we tie domestic change to an international context, removing foreign policy from the sole domain of the government and demonstrating its effect on France in general. Believing from many points of view that "Vietnam is fighting for us," the French used the Vietnam War to better fight for themselves and their own conceptions of what France should be.

## Chapter One

### **"Flattering the Little Sleeping Rooster": The French, De Gaulle, and the Vietnam War in 1965**

In April 1965, Jean-Paul Sartre sat down for an interview with the French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur* to explain why he had backed out of a planned lecture series at Cornell University. America's recent escalation of military activity in Vietnam, Sartre said, made it so that no sincere European leftist could in good conscience travel to the United States. Appearing on U.S. soil had become the equivalent of accepting hospitality from the enemy. Even meeting with American leftists would do no good, because the American left still approved some of what its government did. There could be "no further dialogue possible," Sartre proclaimed, unless they completely condemned *all* of the U.S.' foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

Two weeks later, the French humor weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* published a response letter they claimed to have received from the American intellectual "John-P. Serter," explaining *his* refusal to come to France. John-P. Serter told *Le Canard Enchaîné* that he could not, in good conscience, be seen anymore with a French left that was so enamored with de Gaulle's foreign policy it could no longer effectively oppose him. This foreign policy -- which, according to Serter, had two main aims: "to annoy the Americans [...] and to paralyze the French communist left" -- had succeeded in blinding the French

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre, "Pourquoi je refuse d'aller aux Etats-Unis," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 1 April 1965. Reprinted in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations VIII: Autour du '68* as "Il n'y a plus de dialogue possible."

left to de Gaulle's slow attack on democracy in their country. As Serter put it, "no further discussion was possible unless the French left accepts -- which most of them are not ready to do -- that they need to question the entirety of Gaullist politics, or more exactly its essence: that is to say, a most arbitrary personal power." Even those French leftwingers who recognized that de Gaulle was motivated by nationalism and anticommunism were not worth meeting with. They had become, in Serter's words, stealing, with wickedly satirical intent, a phrase from Frantz Fanon, "the wretched of the earth."<sup>2</sup>

Although the authenticity of Serter's letter and even his existence was questionable, the point he made about the agreement between the French left and de Gaulle on foreign policy was undeniably true. Nowhere was this more evident than on the central international issue of the day: the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. De Gaulle's calls for a negotiated peace, combined with his insistence on the neutralization of Vietnamese territory and his overt critiques of the United States, appeared to be lifted directly from a French leftwing playbook on international relations. The additional demands the French left made when proposing their own solutions to the conflict were, as diplomatic historian Pierre Journoud has put it, more a question of "style" than of "substance."<sup>3</sup> Yet these small stylistic divergences in fact revealed substantial domestic differences over what the French role in international affairs should be.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Treno, "'John-P. Serter': Pourquoi je refuse de venir en France," *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 14 April 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Journoud, "Les relations franco-américaines à l'épreuve du Vietnam entre 1954 et 1975: De la défiance dans la guerre à la coopération pour la paix," (PhD diss, Paris I- Sorbonne, 2009): 1093 n18.

Because de Gaulle's Vietnam War policies made such an impact on international relations, most historical studies have overlooked reactions to his views on the homefront.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on responses in France, however, brings to light the continual battle between Gaullists and their opposition over post-colonial France's role in the world. This held true for the leftists stymied by de Gaulle's apparent usurpation of their rhetoric, as well as for those on the far right who drastically differed with de Gaulle on the Vietnam War and yet could not effectively oppose him. In this chapter, I study how the French left (notably the main political parties of the Parti Communiste Français, the Section Française de l'International Ouvrier, and the Parti Socialiste Unifié) and the French extreme right (notably the group around Tixier-Vignancour and the newspaper Rivarol), dealt with the challenge of de Gaulle's Vietnam War policy, by examining their public commentary on his international actions in the year leading up to the 1965 presidential election.<sup>5</sup> In arguing with De Gaulle's Vietnam War policy, the opposition attempted both to assert their understanding of French national and international identity and to challenge de Gaulle's hegemony over French politics. This study of homefront reactions to an international policy highlights the limitations of political parties in protest movements,

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<sup>4</sup> On de Gaulle's policy on the U.S.-Vietnam War, see in particular Pierre Journoud's dissertation. See also: Maurice Vaïsse, "De Gaulle ou la difficulté d'être Cassandre," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe*, eds. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse (Brussels: Bruyant, 2003); Anne Sa'a'dah, "Idées simples and idées fixes: De Gaulle, The United States, and Vietnam," 295-316; Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Ruler, 1945-1970*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991) and also his article "De Gaulle et la gestion des crises: le discours de Phnom Penh" *Espoir* March 1990; W.W. Kulski, *De Gaulle and the World: The Foreign Policy of the Fifth French Republic* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966); Philippe Devillers, "La politique française et la seconde guerre du Vietnam;" and Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations*.

<sup>5</sup> While Lecanuet announced his candidacy for president in October and ran against de Gaulle as the center-right candidate, I have chosen not to examine his campaign, as he and the group surrounding him do not become part of the French activists around the Vietnam War as do the members of the left and far right under evaluation here.

while additionally demonstrating how conceptions of France's role in the world fed into debates over French national identity.

### **The "Very Pleasing Situation of French Independence:" De Gaulle's Foreign Policy and the U.S.-Vietnam War in 1965**

As American troops increased in Vietnam over the course of 1964, de Gaulle warned more and more often of the risk of another world war. "Never has peace seemed so necessary," he proclaimed at the start of 1965.<sup>6</sup> What concerned de Gaulle most was the perceived threat he felt American presence abroad posed to individual nation's interests, as he believed that the possibility of larger nations imposing their designs by force risked the destruction of newly emerged nations. Additionally, he remarked, "while the possibilities of a world war exploding because of Europe are dissipating, now we see that conflicts in which America has thrown itself in other parts of the world, such as earlier in Korea, more recently in Cuba, and now in Vietnam, risk becoming, due to the well-known effects of escalation, so wide-spread that they could flame up into a general fight." Such a flare-up would inevitably drag in America's allies, and thus entrap France.

By far, however, the most central aspect of de Gaulle's foreign policy lay in his belief in each nation's right to determine, for itself, what it wanted to do. Anne Sa'adah calls this de Gaulle's "*idée fixe*" and argues that its incompatibility with the domino theory was the central reason for the impasse between the two states. In de Gaulle's view, she claims, Americans "were unable to accept the notion that international politics is an arena in which all states rightly and inevitably pursue their national interests through

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<sup>6</sup> De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Pour l'effort, 1962-1965* (Paris: Plon, 1972), 324.

unceasing, though not necessarily violent, conflict."<sup>7</sup> Philip Gordon argues that the Gaullist idea of the nation-state lay "at the heart" of his world view, and notes that the General himself once remarked "nothing is more important than the legitimacy, the institutions, and the functioning of the State."<sup>8</sup>

De Gaulle's emphasis on the importance of national self-determination revealed itself both in his presentation of France and in his proclamations of the rights of other countries. From the moment he took office, de Gaulle worked to create an image of a France standing on its own two feet again and having put itself back upright - much like he had worked to create an image of France liberating itself at the end of the Second World War. He argued that the U.S. could no longer consider France as indebted to America, since France had re-established itself economically.<sup>9</sup> Tending to place blame for France's weakness on the Fourth Republic<sup>10</sup>, he proclaimed the France of his time as independent and able to do what it desired. The move was clearly in defiance of the U.S., as came through in his remarks after a visit to Mexico in 1964:

I've concluded, as has the entire world, that the international situation of our country is more brilliant, more secure, than it ever has been. We are a great nation.

This does not mean that we are in opposition to those who are naturally our friends and allies. They must learn to adapt themselves to this new and, for us, very pleasing situation of French independence. But as soon as they've adjusted and they admit that France, as well as any

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<sup>7</sup> Sa'adah, 296.

<sup>8</sup> De Gaulle quoted in Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 9. Sullivan comments that de Gaulle's belief in national self-determination and interest played a key part in his decision to remove France from NATO, remarking that de Gaulle "challenged the concept of permanent alliances; according to his philosophy, states always pursue their national interest *as they define it*, thereby creating difficulties for alliance agreements that compromise future freedom of action." Sullivan, 11.

<sup>9</sup> De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Pour l'Effort*, 121-122.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 383.

other country, can take initiatives, have its own foreign policy and its own political ideas, there won't be any trouble between us at all. It's up to them! We hope that they'll come around as soon as possible.<sup>11</sup>

Or, as he put it more bluntly as he greeted the end of 1964, "I spoke of our independence. This means that our country, which does not seek to dominate anyone, intends to be its own master."<sup>12</sup>

For de Gaulle, however, French independence was only part of the equation. He proclaimed loudly and often that each people should be allowed to "permitted to act as it chooses in all circumstances." This belief was tied closely to his understanding of Vietnam, as well: in 1963, he proclaimed that the choice of Vietnam's future government lay solely within itself. "It belongs to the [Vietnamese] people, and only to them, to choose the ways to solve their problems," de Gaulle proclaimed, adding that whatever actions Vietnam took, it would find France ready to support them.<sup>13</sup>

De Gaulle had, as historian Anne Sa'adah has commented, "a critique of American policy in Indochina even before the United States had a policy in Indochina."<sup>14</sup> As early as 1961, de Gaulle had sent a message to John F. Kennedy, warning him "not to get caught up in the Vietnam affair. The United States could lose not only its forces, but also its soul."<sup>15</sup> De Gaulle firmly believed that there could be no military solution to the problems in Vietnam and that change had to come from the nation itself. He argued

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<sup>11</sup> De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Vers le Terme, Janvier 1966 - Avril 1969* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 200.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 318-319. One should note that it also meant that de Gaulle intended France to have a strong role in Europe.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Maurice Ferro, *De Gaulle et l'Amérique: une amitié tumultueuse* (Paris: Plon, 1973), 355. Lacouture commented that this was seen as a "stab in the back" by American officials (Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Ruler*, 379).

<sup>14</sup> Sa'adah, 295.

<sup>15</sup> Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Ruler*, 371.



that "there was no possibility that the peoples of Asia would submit to a foreign will coming from the other side of the Pacific, whatever its intentions and however powerful its weapons,"<sup>16</sup> and insisted that international troops would merely exacerbate what was in fact a local situation. As early as 1964, he decried the U.S. presence in Vietnam as a "war action," claiming that Southern guerillas who had disappeared after the Geneva Accords returned because the American actions in the South indicated that the Accords were not being carried out.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, because outside military intervention just inflamed an internal situation, de Gaulle believed the solution to the Vietnamese problems had to be neutralist: a removal of all foreign troops and a cessation of hostilities followed by mediation. He called several times for the creation of a second Geneva Accords, in which he imagined France would play a central role.<sup>18</sup>

The ramifications of de Gaulle's views on Vietnam extended into other areas of his foreign policy as well. In 1965 he used the possibility of France being drawn into a war it did not support as a reason to remove France from the military command of NATO and to have American troops abandon their bases on French soil. He additionally moved to make France a bridge between various fighting parts of the world. In 1964 he established diplomatic relations with China, with the clear intention of using these relations to discuss a settlement of the Vietnamese question.<sup>19</sup> De Gaulle did all of this while positioning himself and France as a friend and aid to third-world countries breaking free from the yoke of colonialism. Overall, outreach met with success. "He is the most

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Sa'adah, 309-310.

<sup>17</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Pour l'effort, 1962-1965*, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Sullivan, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Jean LaCouture, "De Gaulle et la gestion des crises: le discours de Phnom Penh," *Espoir*, 1990, 49-50.

popular among Western statesmen in the Third World of undeveloped countries," political scientist W.W. Kulski would comment in 1966. Quite simply, Kulski proclaimed, de Gaulle "is the hero of the Third World. To it he stands for the liberation of former French colonies in Africa, for the indefatigable apostolate of aid to the underdeveloped people and for nonintervention in their affairs."<sup>20</sup>

### **The Danger of "Appearing Gaullist:" The French Left and the Challenge of De Gaulle and Vietnam**

De Gaulle's policies covered virtually every point the French left itself had raised about U.S. actions in Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> But rather than finding it pleasing, the left found the congruence between their views and de Gaulle's enormously frustrating. Having spent years opposing de Gaulle, the left now faced the horrifying possibility of, as *Le Nouvel Observateur* put it, "appearing Gaullist."<sup>22</sup> Already commentators had begun to mock parts of the left, notably the PCF, for the hypocrisy of their apparent subservience to de Gaulle's foreign policy. *Combat* imagined a meeting where Communist leader Waldeck Rochet, leaving the Elysée palace, paused to enthuse to reporters about every aspect of de Gaulle's current international actions before ending by saying, "I forgot to say: please tell your readers that we denounce Gaullist power and the power of monopolies."<sup>23</sup> But as the PCF noted in their response to *Combat's* article, de Gaulle's policies put the left between

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<sup>20</sup> Kulski, 321.

<sup>21</sup> The differences between de Gaulle's calls for peace in Vietnam and the left's were minimal, with the left additionally calling for additional inclusion of the NLF in discussions and for a Geneva Accords meeting which would strongly involve China and the Soviet Union. I will discuss the differences more later in the chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Martinet, "La peur de paraître Gaulliste," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 13 May 1965.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Claude Vajou, "Le PC reste l'un des meilleurs remparts du Gaullisme et le prouvera par sa tactique électorale au cours de 1965," *Combat* 5 January 1965.

a rock and a hard place. They were forced to choose between supporting a political line that had been theirs for ages, or taking a stand against de Gaulle. In order to please critics, the PCF wondered, "would we have had to refuse peace in Algeria because de Gaulle signed the treaty? Must we argue for the continuation of the war in Vietnam because [de Gaulle] has finally decided to call for the neutralization of the country?"<sup>24</sup>

The left's worry extended beyond the possibility of losing face, although that was an issue. Sticking to their political line and admitting they agreed with de Gaulle held significant risks as well. As the socialist Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO)'s newspaper *Le Populaire* remarked, the popularity of de Gaulle's Vietnam policy lulled French citizens into a complacency that left them unwilling to question other aspects of his regime. "Our foreign policy is a permanent spectacle," *Le Populaire* complained. "[...]The people feel prestigious and demand nothing more than to remain spectators."<sup>25</sup> Journalist Jules Roy claimed that fear of appearing to agree with de Gaulle led to an unusual amount of "reserve and modesty" on the subject of Vietnam from a left that had traditionally spoken out forcefully against other colonial wars. Now, even though their hesitancy "dishonored" them, Roy complained that "the left would rather be quiet rather than appear, however little, to support the politics of a head of state hated for other reasons[.]"<sup>26</sup> The left thus faced a difficult balancing act: maintaining their own views on Vietnam, which closely resembled de Gaulle's, while still critiquing his policy and regime. As commentator Jean Daniel expressed it, the left needed to "take a position

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<sup>24</sup> René Andrieu, "Les Néophytes et les pionniers," *L'Humanité* 6 January 1965.

<sup>25</sup> "L'intervention de Chandernagor dans le debat de politique étrangère," *Le Populaire* 19-20 June 1965.

<sup>26</sup> Jules Roy, "Qui entend les bombes au Vietnam?" *Le Nouvel Observateur* 11 August 1965.

immediately, and in a spectacular fashion. We must not betray principles that have been ours simply because [de Gaulle] is using them; we have to instead show that he is not truly applying them. We must be above Gaullism and not within it. It is when we betray ourselves to oppose de Gaulle that we play into his game."<sup>27</sup> Instead of opposing de Gaulle for the simple sake of opposing him, the left attempted to use the apparent affinities between itself and the General as a gateway to critique his regime in its entirety.

A challenge to de Gaulle's visions for France in the present involved attacking his perceptions of France in the past. In his commentary on Vietnam and his work in the third world in general, de Gaulle drew on the prestige he had garnered in removing France from Algeria to position himself as a hero of decolonization. The move placed him at the center of a historical narrative the left considered their own, and they worked hard to diminish his claims by establishing their own primacy in this regard. The Parti Communiste Français placed their action against the U.S. in Vietnam within a continuity of anti-colonial protests that began with the French war in Indochina. They referenced their support of dockers who, during the French "*sale guerre*," had refused to load arms onto ships bound for Indochina, and they frequently had Henri Martin, a Party member who had refused to serve in Indochina, come to speak at protest meetings.<sup>28</sup> In this way, they underlined the long-term commitment to decolonization that had defined Communist politics. Socialists in the PSU highlighted de Gaulle's own responsibility for the French phase of the war, remarking that it was "*piquant* to see the man who sent Argenlieu to

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<sup>27</sup> Jean Daniel, "La seconde méthode," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 29 April 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Gérard Gatinot, "Arrêtez la sale guerre! ont crié, unanimes, les milliers de Parisiens rassemblés hier dans une Mutualité trop petite à l'appel des jeunesses communistes. Délégations massives aujourd'hui à l'ambassade américaine. La foule a chaleureusement applaudi les exposés de Madeleine Riffaud Christian Echard et Roland Leroy," *L'Humanité* 12 February 1965.

reconquer Indochina in 1945, and who has never disavowed the war that ended in Dien-Bien-Phu, playing today at being the protector of the Vietnamese people."<sup>29</sup> Their historical reminder challenged de Gaulle's narrative of himself as a crusader for decolonization.

Pierre Mendes-France, former president of the Fourth Republic, which had experienced both the wars in Indochina and in Algeria, took Gaullist Michel Debré to task over the Gaullist claims to supporting decolonization. "We've come a long way from the time when notions [about decolonization and self-determination] seemed scandalous to friends of Mr. Michel Debré and to Michel Debré himself!" Mendès-France exclaimed during a debate. "When we wanted to explain to the French, not so long ago, the need to give people in the colonies a growing dose of autonomy, towards their liberation [...] what difficulties we had [!]" When Debré responded that de Gaulle had been defending these concepts since 1958, Mendès-France shot back that the left had been applying them "against all odds for quite some time, against which they raised in this country passions, anger and violence, to such an extent that it was against the right of people to dispose of themselves, against self-determination, that came to be, you remember, the May 13th rebellion that gave birth to the current regime."<sup>30</sup> By insisting on a long history of decolonization anchored firmly to the left, left-wing commentators attempted to tie liberal progress in France to actions of the French left rather than to de Gaulle.

Leftwing commentators consistently worked to challenge not only the length of de Gaulle's commitment to decolonization, the third world, and thus to Vietnam, but also

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<sup>29</sup> Pierre Naville, "Vietnam: La Guerre s'étend. Il faut reconnaître l'autorité du Front National de Libération," *Tribune Socialiste* 8 May 1965.

<sup>30</sup> "Le débat de l'année: Mendès-France Michel Debré," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1 December 1965.

his sincerity. Repeatedly in their attacks on his foreign policy, the left conflated the French government with de Gaulle himself, and attributed motivation for governmental actions to what they saw as de Gaulle's personal failings. Of particular concern was the belief that de Gaulle's actions rose from a desire for vengeance for past personal wrongs, rather than from an objective assessment of France's needs. De Gaulle's attacks on America were thus fixed by commentators within the history of his experience during World War II, notably during Yalta, where de Gaulle was not included in the meeting of the Allied leaders. After de Gaulle issued a statement in late April underlining France's independence from the U.S., the socialist paper *Le Populaire* noted dryly "It's clear that de Gaulle is still having a hard time choking down Yalta." While the socialists agreed that Yalta had been a bitter pill for French pride, they noted that more than twenty years had passed and much had changed in the world. Nothing, they claimed, "is more dangerous than basing an entire political line on a long-lasting personal resentment."<sup>31</sup> Jean Daniel for *Le Nouvel Observateur* fixed Yalta as the moment when de Gaulle's plans for France's grandeur were blocked, and depicted him as forever attempting to overcome that obstacle.<sup>32</sup> In a more humorous vein, *Le Canard Enchaîné* published a cartoon on January 27, 1965 depicted de Gaulle standing next to a carnival-style wood cut-out of the historic photo of the three leaders at Yalta, ready to put his own head in when the photographer gave the OK.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gérard Jaquet, "La véritable indépendance," *Le Populaire* 8-9 May 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Daniel, "Ce qui obsède de Gaulle," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 4 February 1965.

<sup>33</sup> No title, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 27 January 1965.

In general, however, the left found de Gaulle's "obsession" with *grandeur* no laughing matter. As the motivation for the majority of his foreign policy actions, this rampant nationalism seemed to the left to provide a flimsy basis for sincere efforts. In their view, in fact, de Gaulle's *grandeur* was no more than grandstanding, and they used analysis of his Vietnam War policy to attempt to show his lack of substance there and in all of his foreign policy. "The Vietnam War is precisely the kind of situation that allows us to judge how serious de Gaulle is in his discourses in favor of independence and peace," declared the *Tribune Socialiste*. They wondered "What is the French government doing to put into practice the principles it preaches? When you get down to it, it's not doing anything but talking."<sup>34</sup> The left pointed out that de Gaulle's proposals for peace bolstered French pride but involved no actual commitments. As *Tribune Socialiste* put it, "It's hard to see how this prestige could survive real conflicts (as contenting oneself with regretting the situation in St. Domingo and Vietnam does not go very far)."<sup>35</sup> In the P.C.F. newspaper *L'Humanité*, Yves Moreau emphasized that de Gaulle had not really done anything, noting "He declares himself [...] for the neutralization of South Vietnam, but he's hardly taken any initiatives to apply the reasonable declarations that he's made [...]"<sup>36</sup> *Le Populaire* commented that while de Gaulle had taken a strong stand on Vietnam and other issues, "as these declarations have changed nothing in global politics and as the United States, in particular, has viewed them as unimportant, we've stayed at the stage of

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<sup>34</sup> "Vietnam: La guerre s'étend. L'action internationale pour la paix doit s'amplifier," *Tribune Socialiste* 29 May 1965.

<sup>35</sup> "Pour une politique étrangère authentiquement progressiste," *Tribune Socialiste* 4 December 1965.

<sup>36</sup> Yves Moreau, "De Gaulle et les réalités," *L'Humanité* 2 janvier 1965.

freedom of expression."<sup>37</sup> Claude Martinet for the PSU urged the left to ask for real action, arguing "We can't be happy with declarations of intent and winks aimed at journalists."<sup>38</sup> In short, the left saw de Gaulle's search for grandeur through his stand on Vietnam and from there on French independence as nothing more than empty promises with no real effect beyond making the French feel proud. As Claude Fuzier remarked in *Le Populaire*, the Gaullists were "trying to flatter the little sleeping rooster at the heart of a certain number of Frenchmen."<sup>39</sup>

These attempts at flattery were particularly disturbing to the left because the left saw them as based on hypocritical double-standards which they felt permeated de Gaulle's regime. He claimed independence from the United States and critiqued the American war effort, leftist commentators noted, but (at least at the start of 1965) American troops occupied stations on French soil, and American companies held a strong control over the French economy.<sup>40</sup> "A country colonized economically can not, in effect, be independent," Gaston Defferre remarked in *Le Populaire*.<sup>41</sup> Fellow *Populaire* writer Christian Pineau observed "There's no doubt that no other French leader has expressed himself so disagreeably to foreign powers, and notably the United States, in quite some time. But that does not constitute a showing of independence." While

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<sup>37</sup> Christian Pineau, "Le Mensonge de l'indépendance," *Le Populaire* 4-5 May 1965.

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Martinet, "Pour arrêter l'escalade," *Tribune Socialiste* 17 April 1965.

<sup>39</sup> Claude Fuzier, "Le pseudo coup d'envoi," *Le Populaire* 14-15 April 1965.

<sup>40</sup> See for example: Yves Moreau, "De Gaulle et les réalités"; Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch, "Une politique indépendante," *L'Humanité* 3 May 1965; Yves Moreau, "La 'Doctrine Johnson,'" *L'Humanité* 13 May 1965; Gilles Martinet, "Pour arrêter l'escalade"; "Vietnam: La guerre s'étend. L'action internationale pour la paix doit s'amplifier"; "La politique internationale (Rapport présenté par Paul Parisot)," *Tribune Socialiste* 12 June 1965; René Andrieu, "Avant-première de l'Élysée," *L'Humanité* 10 September 1965.

<sup>41</sup> Gaston Defferre, "Le Faux Dilemme," *Le Populaire* 4-5 May 1965.



admitting that de Gaulle's foreign policy stands, notably on Vietnam, made him stand out, Pineau argued that nevertheless de Gaulle was not being taken seriously, and thus these attempts at independence were really nothing more than "freedom of speech."<sup>42</sup>

Although de Gaulle positioned himself as a strong supporter of self-determination and decolonization, the left saw him still as the defender of traditional capitalist and imperialist interests. *L'Humanité* underlined that he took stands only where it benefited French monopolies, declaring him the "spokesman" for the "grande bourgeoisie."<sup>43</sup> The P.S.U. noted that he urged freedom for others but kept a stronghold on French possessions in the Pacific that were essential for French atomic development.<sup>44</sup> Finally, the left questioned whether de Gaulle truly wanted peace in the world. His dedication to establishing a French nuclear strike force appeared to contradict his stated goal to avoid having war spread from Vietnam throughout the world, especially since many feared that tensions between the U.S. and China in Vietnam could lead to the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>45</sup> The PSU went so far as to hint that de Gaulle's actions could reignite old enmities. Commenting that "The 'reprobation' that Gaullism directs against American policies in Vietnam and Latin America is not expressed by positive acts," the socialists warned that "the exaltation of nationalism limits France's international action and creates

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<sup>42</sup> Christian Pineau, "Le Mensonge de l'indépendance," *Le Populaire* 6-7 May 1965.

<sup>43</sup> René Andrieu, "Avant-première de l'Elysée."

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Naville, "Vietnam: La Guerre s'étend. Il faut reconnaître l'autorité du Front National de Libération;" Pierre Naville, "La politique extérieure du gaullisme: une hypocrisie," *Tribune Socialiste* 26 June 1965.

<sup>45</sup> See for example the views expressed by Pierre Naville in "Pour le boycott du régime de Saigon. 'L'escalade' du Vietnam," *Tribune Socialiste* 3 April 1965, and by Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch in "Une politique indépendante."

new dangers, in particular by encouraging the rebirth of German nationalism."<sup>46</sup> In the eyes of the left, de Gaulle's stand on Vietnam and his subsequent foreign policy had created an international identity for France as a country puffed up with pride but lacking actual power, a country playing with matches but unable to handle the fire that would result.

But as Claude Fuzier remarked for the SFIO, "in order to be heard or understood, a nation has no need for sulks caused by vanity, nor tantrums caused by pride, nor the moodiness of those who confuse character with bad character."<sup>47</sup> The left wanted to look beyond a French identity conflated with and limited by de Gaulle and his desires, to a France truly able to participate in the modern world. The different parties urged France to take more concrete actions, including recognizing North Vietnam (which de Gaulle did not officially do), and standing up to the U.S. by refusing military connections with NATO and by requesting the removal of American troops (which de Gaulle did do over the course of 1965). But primarily they pushed for a foreign policy separated from what they saw as the dictates of de Gaulle's ego. Where de Gaulle sought international relations with France in a leading position, the left argued for international relations based on cooperation with France in a position of influence and suasion. De Gaulle's attempts at re-establishing France, they felt, had in fact hurt her. "In the name of grandeur, those in the hallways of power continue to pursue a political line that step by step is leading France to isolation," Henri Dusart complained in *Le Populaire*.<sup>48</sup> Politician

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<sup>46</sup> "La politique internationale (Rapport présenté par Paul Parisot)."

<sup>47</sup> Claude Fuzier, "Le pseudo coup d'envoi."

<sup>48</sup> Henri Dusart, "La signification de l'affaire de l'OTASE: Quand de Gaulle ne peut imposer ses vues il boude," *Le Populaire* 22-23 April 1965.

Guy Mollet felt that the only result of de Gaulle's foreign policy was that "when he leaves power he will have left France more isolated than she has ever been, and for nothing. I repeat: for nothing."<sup>49</sup> Leftwing presidential candidate François Mitterand also took de Gaulle to task. "General de Gaulle has the respect of people around the world, that's true, and it's a plus for France, but he does nothing with this respect beside serving his own stature," Mitterand commented. "It's too bad, when he could be using [this respect] as the best tool for returning France to the role she should have: [he could be] fighting against the spread of nuclear arms[,] fighting for international mediation, fighting for the respect of all attempts [...] for dialogue between peoples."<sup>50</sup>

### **De Gaulle's "'Trojan Horse' of Communism:" The Far Right on de Gaulle and Vietnam**

The far right faced a different set of issues than the left, but held the same desire to challenge de Gaulle's prestige and power. Like the left, commentators at the far right newspaper *Rivarol* worried over the extent of control de Gaulle seemed to exercise over the French electorate. "Never before have our people [...] accepted so passively having their destiny subjected to the humors, to the fantasies, to the nightmares of an egotist who idolizes himself and for whom the world has no sense or value except as an instrument of his own will," the editorial board grumbled in October 1965. The stupor in which the population seemed sunk horrified *Rivarol*, as they saw it as an attack on "the roots of national vitality and energy."<sup>51</sup> During his 1965 campaign, far-right candidate Tixier-Vignancour, warning of his opponent's support for "North Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh,"

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<sup>49</sup> "Guy Mollet dénonce l'aggravation du pouvoir personnel et de l'isolement réel de la France," *Le Populaire* 22-23 June 1965.

<sup>50</sup> "Le discours de François Mitterand," *Le Populaire* 12-13 October 1965.

<sup>51</sup> "Editorial," *Rivarol* 14 October 1965.

claimed that "the French people, brainwashed by one-sided propaganda, doesn't realize the importance of the engagement it's undertaking for the next seven years [by voting for de Gaulle in the upcoming election.]."<sup>52</sup> *Le Populaire* bemoaned a nation content to be merely "spectators;" *Rivarol* deplored a "practically commonplace apathy and indifference."<sup>53</sup> De Gaulle's need to control the French for himself, they warned, put the nation at risk of not being able to defend itself if necessary.

The question of defense played a central role for the far right, because unlike the left, they did not agree in the slightest with de Gaulle's assessment of the situation in Vietnam. Where de Gaulle argued for a war based on the right to self-determination, the far right saw the frontlines of the war against a spreading and monolithic communism. Unquestionably, they supported the Domino Theory. "Since 1917, a planetary war is taking place under our very eyes," commentator Pierre Dominique explained. "The battle rages on between two conceptions of the world." In this global war, the local fight in Vietnam held great significance. "Whether the Americans are well placed or poorly placed, whether they've been able or clumsy, the fact remains: if they release their pressure today, everything will fall in Southeast Asia," Dominique warned. "Everything."<sup>54</sup> Quite simply, the weight of the free world rested on the United States' shoulders. "It's not overdramatizing the danger, or overstating things to proclaim this evidence," the editorial board wrote in February: "Either the US makes the DECISIVE HIT to the communist front in Southeast Asia, or the mortal enemies of the West will draw from the

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<sup>52</sup> "Tixier dans le Midi," *Rivarol* 8 April 1965. The "seven years" refers to the length of a French presidential term.

<sup>53</sup> "Editorial," *Rivarol* 14 October 1965.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Dominique, "Si Johnson lâchait pied..." *Rivarol* 12 August 1965.

American defeat the ASSURANCE that 'capitalist countries' have given up defending themselves and that henceforth no obstacle keeps them from installing their domination everywhere." It would, *Rivarol* stated, be only a matter of time from the fall of Vietnam to the "final triumph" of communist forces.<sup>55</sup>

American success held particular importance for the far right because they saw the Americans as taking up their own fight -- not, as one would suppose, of continuing the fight begun by the French in Indochina, but rather of the fight against communism the far right believed they had been forced to abandon in the more recent Algerian War. In *Rivarol's* presentation, communist forces directed by the Soviet Union played a strong role in the uprising and subsequent loss of the former French colony. "How often did we repeat that Algeria was the bastion of western defense in the Mediterranean, that its fall would irreversibly signify for Europe the definitive loss of its influence in Africa and, for Communist imperialism, the possibility of taking advantage of the European continent?" *Rivarol* demanded in January 1965. "In the same way, Vietnam is today the key to Asia. It is equally the supreme 'test' of the United States', shield of the free world, will to resist the 'sprawling marxism' whose objective is and will remain [...] the enslavement of the entire planet[.]"<sup>56</sup> Algeria was now "one of the principal means by which the subversive current [of Communism] passed,"<sup>57</sup> and "the fight in Vietnam is the penultimate episode of [the] battle."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "Editorial," *Rivarol* 4 février 1965; emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup> "Sol W. Sanders, correspondant de 'US News' au Vietnam: 'Nous vivons dans un monde froid, cruel, implacable et l'on ne peut gagner une guerre qu'en consentant des sacrifices,'" *Rivarol* 28 January 1965.

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Dominique, "L'adversaire avance sans réplique," *Rivarol* 7 January 1965.

<sup>58</sup> Pierre Dominique, "Un bilan de faillite," *Rivarol* 22 July 1965.

Seeing the war as a struggle against Communism, the far right naturally opposed de Gaulle's calls for neutralization and a negotiated peace. Neutralism was a bad policy anywhere, whether it applied to the Congo or Vietnam. In both instances it would represent a caving in to communism. The U.S., the far right argued, had no business pulling back, as history showed. "Sedan, Coventry, Pearl Harbor, Dresden, Auschwitz, Hiroshima were the fruits of English treaties with Hitler, of English and French inertia faced with Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhine," former Vichyite Lucien Rebatet reminded Rivarol's readers after warning them that accepting neutralism in the Congo would be agreeing to the fall of Vietnam. "We shudder to think we might write one day that it was in knocking out the Chinese during the Korean War, as MacArthur wanted, or in saving the Congo, that we could have avoided the third world war, the nuclear war, annihilating the third, the half or even more of the human race."<sup>59</sup> Noted anti-communist crusader Suzanne Labin insisted that the fight had to be carried on in Vietnam or it risked danger to France itself. Neutralization, she argued, really meant leaving use of military arms to the communists. "Can't we see," she proclaimed, "that if we tell the communists all they have to do is bring out their daggers and their submachine guns in order to oblige the West to negotiate a 'neutrality,' that that will lead us tomorrow to negotiating the neutrality of Naples, and after that, the neutrality of Billancourt?"<sup>60</sup>

In truth, the far right believed the theoretical loss of Billancourt represented de Gaulle's deepest, darkest desires. For the left, de Gaulle's policies arose from his wish for

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<sup>59</sup> Lucien Rebatet, "Perspectives noires," *Rivarol* 14 January 1965.

<sup>60</sup> Etienne Lardemot, "Le Sud-vietnam, nouvelle étape de l'expansion communiste," *Rivarol* 24 June 1965. Billancourt is a suburb of Paris.

grandeur and self-aggrandizement. The right similarly saw de Gaulle as an egotistical maniac -- invoking La Fontaine's fables, they compared him to "a frog who risked paying too dear for his dream of grandeur"<sup>61</sup> -- but for the far right, he was an egotist with a secret purpose: the installation of a communist regime within Vietnam and, eventually, in France. His claims to neutrality were but a thin front for his real motivations. "Current French diplomacy has no illusions on the authenticity of the 'neutrality' it is promising to South Vietnam," Suzanne Labin sneered. "[I]t knows that the so-called political solution consists, in reality, of turning Vietnam over to communism, just after a set period and the decorum of a treaty."<sup>62</sup> In its humor column, *Rivarol* mocked de Gaulle's supposed impartiality. After Sukarno revealed that de Gaulle had told him he believed the Vietcong would win, the "Evil Eye" scoffed. "Thus the general, who's so concerned with the future of the world, has already bet on the Vietcong! There's neutralism for you!"<sup>63</sup>

In the view of the far right, de Gaulle's commitment to communism was of long term and would continue unabated unless challenged. He was, as they noted, the man who had "voluntarily abandoned Algeria, where Moscow was now more and more solidly staking its claim."<sup>64</sup> Now, they claimed, his foreign policy had fallen even further under Soviet control, as evidenced by his anti-American actions, particularly in Vietnam. Like the left's critics, the far right saw connections between de Gaulle and the left, but rather than believing these similarities showed a weakness of the left, the far right felt they

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<sup>61</sup> "La grenouille qui veut se faire aussi grosse que le boeuf" est également une fable de La Fontaine," *Rivarol*, 29 April 1965.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Le Mauvais Oeil, "Plumes et Paons," *Rivarol* 12 August 1965.

<sup>64</sup> Pierre Dominique, "M. De Gaulle vivant et régnant, attendons-nous au pire," *Rivarol* 3 June 1965.

demonstrated the communists were "playing" de Gaulle whose "foreign policy was theirs [the Communists]".<sup>65</sup> France, the far right insisted, was in danger from the communists, but not necessarily from the Communist party: this danger "was more a problem of foreign policy than domestic policy." As one commentator wrote, "The danger lies essentially in the sabotage of European construction, in the disintegration of NATO, in the policy of *ouverture* to the East, the systematic denigration of American policy, the recognition of communist China [...]"<sup>66</sup> Or, as Pierre Dominique put it, "Our particular misfortune -- we who abandoned, systematically, the strategic location of Algeria, political key of the Mediterranean -- is to have at our head a man who wants Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and who, to this end, intends, with the certainty he has that communism is the future for him, to throw himself into the lion's mouth."<sup>67</sup>

The far right used its challenge to de Gaulle's neutralism and its belief in his ostensible desire for a communist front in France as a means of arguing for a switch to a far-right political regime. Lucien Rebatet cast the war against Communism as a war of the white Western race against the other, warning ominously of the wave of "anti-white" reaction that would follow if the US lost in Vietnam. "De Gaulle's Sovietized policy could have drastic, if not irreparable, consequences for Europe," Rebatet proclaimed. "In any case it's to this breach that the Elysee is working: destroying the Western group, discouraging the Americans in their defense of the old world, opening the doors everywhere to a mortal neutralism."<sup>68</sup> Pierre Dominique cautioned that democracy alone

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<sup>65</sup> Pierre Dominique, "La saison des traîtres," *Rivarol* 21 January 1965.

<sup>66</sup> B. Dufour, "C'est en votant De Gaulle que vous voteriez pour l'Est!," *Rivarol* 16 December 1965.

<sup>67</sup> Pierre Dominique, "Un bilan de faillite," *Rivarol* 22 July 1965.

<sup>68</sup> Lucien Rebatet, "En attendant le traité franco-soviétique," *Rivarol* 29 April 1965.



could not fight against the communism de Gaulle was attempting to let in. Denigrating de Gaulle's call for a new Geneva conference, Dominique wrote that "De Gaulle, more myopic than we thought, unless he's flat-out playing the Russian-Chinese game, wants his conference -- so he can shine there -- and believes, moreover, that Communism is the way history is going." De Gaulle, Dominique insisted, believed Communism was not that evil and that once the French had more dealings with it, they would accept it. In Dominique's view, there was only way to combat this: "We must, our feet firmly planted in the earth, set up in France and in all of the West -- as Maurras put it -- 'national socialism liberated from democracy,' otherwise known as fascism." Only this "interior toughening" would allow the French to fight the "Trojan horse" of Communism de Gaulle had put in place.<sup>69</sup>

### **Sending French Gratitude to American Troops: The Far Right Candidacy of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour**

Despite this virulent proclamation, the candidate chosen to represent the far right, Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, did not run explicitly as a fascist but instead as the representative of "the national opposition."<sup>70</sup> "I am the candidate of youth and country," he proclaimed proudly<sup>71</sup>. Tixier-Vignancour had long been a fixture on the far right. A

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<sup>69</sup> Pierre Dominique, "La guerre de Demain," *Rivarol* 18 February 1965.

<sup>70</sup> Tixier-Vignancour additionally refused the epithet "far-right," arguing it was being applied to him by the "Gaullist press" as a way of smearing his campaign. "Dans une lettre-programme, Tixier-Vignancour nous précise, de la manière définitive, le caractère de sa candidature," *Rivarol* 27 mai 1965. *Le Nouvel Observateur* astutely pointed out that Tixier-Vignancour ran his campaign without being overtly fascist as part of an attempt to attract the center and center-right (Olivier Todd, "Tixier en piste," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 4 August 1965). However, as I see "far-right" as an accurate description of his political position, I have chosen to use it in spite of his protests.

<sup>71</sup> Maurice Armand, "La réunion de Châteauroux," *Rivarol* 30 September 1965. J. G. Shields provides an excellent overview of Tixier-Vignancour's 1965 campaign, focusing in on the interactions among members of the far left it occasioned, notably Tixier-Vignancour's relationship with Jean-Marie Le-Pen, future leader

former worker in Vichy's propaganda ministry, he was also a lawyer who had defended OAS members after the Algerian war.<sup>72</sup> Proud of his collaborationist and colonialist past, he strongly contrasted with de Gaulle. From a political background characterized by challenges to Gaullist policies and actions, Tixier-Vignancour stepped easily into a campaign in which he incarnated opposition to de Gaulle in every area.

At campaign stops, Tixier-Vignancour would often salute American troops serving in Vietnam. Invoking the American war effort allowed Tixier-Vignancour and his supporters at *Rivarol* to denigrate de Gaulle's commitment to the free world and to underline, by extension, his connections with Communism. In an early 1965 visit to Strasbourg, the "capital of Europe," Tixier-Vignancour argued that "the government of France of tomorrow must insert itself into a free world." To emphasize this, he then contrasted his continued support for the Atlantic Alliance with de Gaulle's weakening bonds, and proclaimed, "I send from Strasbourg, tonight, my salute to American aviators defending liberty in South Vietnam." The proclamation, *Rivarol* reported, was met with ovations.<sup>73</sup> A similar declaration in Poitiers a week later led to such an uproar that *Rivarol* claimed it took over ten minutes to calm the room down enough for Tixier to leave.<sup>74</sup> Moving into more explicit racism, Tixier-Vignancour used Vietnam during a meeting in Aix-en-Provence as a means of positioning himself as a key defender of the

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of the Front National. See J.G. Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (Routledge: New York, 2007): 127-131.

<sup>72</sup> For more information on Tixier-Vignancour's life, see Thierry Bouclier, *Tixier Vignancour* (Paris: Éditions Remi Perrin, 2003). Jean Mabire, a fervent admirer, also wrote a biography during the 1965 presidential campaign, which depicts Tixier-Vignancour as the savior of France through his actions during the Algerian War and against de Gaulle. Jean Mabire, *Tixier-Vignancour: histoire d'un français* (Paris: Éditions Déterna, 2001).

<sup>73</sup> Maurice Armand, "Tixier: Champagne, Alsace et Lorraine," *Rivarol* 18 February 1965.

<sup>74</sup> "Tixier à Poitiers," *Rivarol* 4 March 1965.

white West. In a speech where he also argued for doing away with aid to third-world countries, Tixier-Vignancour declared "I send a salute and the gratitude of the French nation to the American marines, soldiers and airmen who in Vietnam are defending peace and the honor of the white man." He reminded his auditeurs that de Gaulle supported Ho Chi Minh, warning them that "Western civilization depends on the survival and the victory of the free world."<sup>75</sup>

Tixier-Vignancour's most explicit challenge to de Gaulle's foreign policy came when he undertook a trip to South Vietnam in September 1965. The South Vietnamese government had broken off diplomatic relations with France three months earlier in June, accusing de Gaulle of providing aid to North Vietnam. South Vietnam's government declared it "did not want to give any other advantages to a country that claims to be a friend and treats us like an enemy." As General Ky made very clear, the South Vietnamese anger was directed at de Gaulle's policies; South Vietnam "kept the same friendly sentiments towards the French people." Positioning himself as a represent of the French people and as the opposite of de Gaulle, Tixier-Vignancour traveled to South Vietnam for a short trip in which he met with South Vietnamese government officials and made several public declarations of his belief in the quick end to the war. Arguing that "Communists, progressists and Gaullists" in France had taken up the cause of the Viet Cong, he declared his intent to take a stand for the South Vietnamese. "I do not want the aggressor's cause to be the only one defended," he proclaimed.<sup>76</sup> He declared

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<sup>75</sup> "Tixier dans le Midi," *Rivarol* 8 April 1965.

<sup>76</sup> "M Tixier-Vignancourt à Saigon: le Vietcong est déjà vaincu militairement," *Le Monde* 15 September 1965.

that once elected, his first official visit would be to South Vietnam and assured that South Vietnam "would re-establish relations with France as soon as de Gaulle has left the Elysée."<sup>77</sup> Returning to France, Tixier-Vignancour placed his connections with the South Vietnamese as part of a continuation of the right's fight against communism, this time reflecting directly on the French war in Indochina. He had experienced a "great emotion" upon seeing Saigon because "it was there that the French army, made up of these admirable units for whom we still have such respectful honor, bolted the door which protects South-East Asia."<sup>78</sup> Through the visit he placed de Gaulle firmly within the Communist camp, argued that his actions hurt France's relations with the rest of the world, and sought to establish himself as a viable alternative to de Gaulle.

### **"It's Foreign Policy Which Commands Domestic Policy:" The Left and the Election**

Although similarly opposed to de Gaulle, the left had a much more difficult time finding a candidate to represent their opposition. An early attempt by centrist socialist Gaston Deferre collapsed spectacularly in June after he failed to convince all of the left-wing parties to participate in his "Federation of the Left." Deferre's candidacy failed for several reasons, including his attempts to pander simultaneously to both the Communist left and the Republican center, but his stance on the Vietnam War held a center role for the other leftist parties.<sup>79</sup> Deferre's Section Française de l'Internationale Socialiste was far more "Atlanticist" than the other leftist parties, arguing that the French needed to work

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<sup>77</sup> "M Tixier Vignancourt: la guerre au Vietnam sera terminée le 1er novembre," *Le Monde* 16 September 1965.

<sup>78</sup> M.A., "Soirée roborative à la Mutualité," *Rivarol* 30 September 1965.

<sup>79</sup> For a contemporary analysis of the failure of Deferre's Federation and his candidacy, see: "Les raisons d'un échec," *Le Populaire* 19-20 June 1965 and Hector de Galard, "Le successeur," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1 July 1965.

with the United States, rather than against it.<sup>80</sup> Although they protested the war, they additionally claimed that the Vietcong bore as much responsibility for the outbreak of the war as the United States, a stance that horrified the Communists.<sup>81</sup> Explaining their reasons for not supporting Deferre, the Communists noted "It's true that Gaston Deferre doesn't have a word in him to denounce American aggression in Vietnam and San Domingo, which has embarrassed a certain number of his own supporters."<sup>82</sup> Deferre's views caused others on the left to accuse him of not offering any real "democratic alternative" to de Gaulle's policies. "[His] victory would mark the return to 'Atlantic' conformism, which would exclude, in particular, all real opposition to the current American interventions in South-East Asia and in Latin America."<sup>83</sup> Deferre withdrew in early June, leaving the left without a clear candidate for several months. The left finally settled upon socialist François Mitterand as its joint candidate, supported by the PCF, the PSU, and the SFIO. This candidacy came with some compromises -- as the *Nouvel Observateur* noted, Mitterand had had to step up his denunciations of American policy and the PCF had had to accept the plurality of leftist parties, among other things -- but Mitterand the candidate did receive the support of all major parties.<sup>84</sup>

As the December election date drew closer, leftwing commentators insisted on the centrality of Vietnam to the elections. Sartre proclaimed in an opinion piece in *Le Nouvel*

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<sup>80</sup> "Guy Mollet dénonce l'aggravation du pouvoir personnel et de l'isolement réel de la France," *Le Populaire* 22-23 June 1965. As Mollet noted in the article, he did not believe the U.S. was entirely right in its foreign policy, but he felt that France would have more influence with the U.S. if they approached as allies rather than antagonists.

<sup>81</sup> Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch, "Qui donc est l'agresseur?" *L'Humanité* 23 April 1965.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in P.J. "Accouchement difficile: La 'Fédération' Deferre se présente mal."

<sup>83</sup> "La politique internationale (Rapport présenté par Paul Parisot)."

<sup>84</sup> Jean Daniel, "Le Coup du 5 décembre,"

*Observateur* that "Today in France, it's foreign policy which commands domestic policy."<sup>85</sup> Jean Daniel, also in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, declared Vietnam the biggest international stake of the elections and stated that a candidate without a firm stand on it would be seen by him as an "adversary."<sup>86</sup> Yet when Mitterand's platform emerged, Vietnam was nearly absent.<sup>87</sup> This was perhaps due to a desire to play down an issue that divided the left amongst itself, but public commentary indicated that a prime concern was avoiding giving support to de Gaulle on an issue where he already held popularity. Instead, the left highlighted other foreign policy issues, such as the European Union or nuclear disarmament, where de Gaulle appeared weaker. Leftists would grudgingly admit that there were some areas of de Gaulle's foreign policy they approved, but they hurried to underline that if he had arrived at the right decision, it was for the wrong reason, and they gave short shrift to the question of Vietnam in general. Discussing Mitterand's foreign policy, *Le Populaire* underlined the importance of his insistence on a strong role for Europe, arguing that while de Gaulle had taken a strong stance on Vietnam, his voice was "nothing compared to what Europe could do."<sup>88</sup> The choice to foreground Europe and move away from Vietnam demonstrated the strong hold de Gaulle had on France in the domain of foreign policy. While the left had earlier tried to use Vietnam to challenge his national and international ideas about France, they were forced during the election to

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<sup>85</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le Choc en retour," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 8 December 1965.

<sup>86</sup> Jean Daniel, "Avant la rentrée," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 25 August 1965.

<sup>87</sup> Claude Estier, "Au delà du 5 décembre," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 17 November 1965; "Mitterand: 28 propositions pour une démocratie véritable." Vietnam was proposal eight of nine in Mitterand's foreign policy section and Mitterand recommended only returning to the Geneva Accords to settle the issues in South-East Asia.

<sup>88</sup> "Après la déclaration du général de Gaulle: L'unique réplique au défi du pouvoir personnel est de voter massivement pour François Mitterand." *Le Populaire* 6-7 November 1965.

mute their concerns and direct them elsewhere, for fear of appearing to support de Gaulle and perhaps further awakening yet more sleeping roosters in the hearts of those who might otherwise have voted for the left.

### **Between De Gaulle and "Chaos": Election Results and Effects on Vietnam War Activism**

Although the opposition framed their candidacies against Gaullist policies, de Gaulle himself waited until November 4 to declare his candidacy. In his declaration speech, de Gaulle presented a choice between himself and chaos, warning that if people voted for him, the "future of the Republic would decidedly be guaranteed," but if not, "no one can doubt that it will collapse quickly and that France will have to endure -- but this time without any possible recourse-- a confusion of the State more disastrous than that she has previously known." Although he did not directly reference Vietnam, he warned that the French were risking "the situation and the actions of France in a world overrun by immeasurable dangers, [... ] the cooperation practiced with those peoples where our colonization had become anachronistic and, often, bloody," as well as "the consideration and the audience of other peoples justifiably obtained by us in searching everywhere the cause of liberation, development and joint aide upon which depends henceforth the sort of the human community."<sup>89</sup> By threatening to remove himself from the French political scene entirely if he were not re-elected, de Gaulle asserted that French foreign policy and the security of the world were tied to his continuing as President.

Despite de Gaulle's perceived popularity, he received only 44% of the votes, forcing a run-off with the second-place candidate, Mitterand. Although Tixier-

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<sup>89</sup>*Discours et Messages: Pour l'Effort*, 401. The comment "without any possible recourse" refers to the fact that if he is rejected by voters, de Gaulle will not once again return to politics, as he did after WWII and at the height of the Algerian War in 1958.

Vignancour was forced out, *Rivarol* rejoiced in de Gaulle's loss, arguing that in addition to clearly showing reprobation for his Algerian policies, the French people's voting choices were significant because "above all, *a majority of the French turned away from him, FROM THE MAN, which told him he was not a God.*"<sup>90</sup> Determined to knock de Gaulle down even further, *Rivarol* then threw its support behind the left-wing candidate. Specifically justifying their support for Mitterand in foreign policy, *Rivarol* argued that Mitterand would be "MORE ATLANTIC" and "MORE EUROPEAN" than de Gaulle, and urged their voters "Whatever you think of his opponent, vote against de Gaulle!"<sup>91</sup>

Even additional right-wing support was not enough, however, and Mitterand lost the second round of the 1965 Presidential election, leaving de Gaulle slightly shaken by the challenge but firmly ensconced in power. In the coming year, de Gaulle would further undermine the left by enacting several of their proposals, establishing contact with North Vietnam via a letter exchange with Ho Chi Minh, completing the removal of American troops from French soil, and withdrawing France from the military command of NATO. He would take his strongest stand about the war on September 1, 1966, during his celebrated speech at Phnom Penh, Cambodia. But while he solidified his power and his stance, elements on the left would move from working primarily within political parties to challenge de Gaulle, to participating predominantly in social movements dedicated to fighting the war. From outside traditional political channels, where the far right was already established, the left would find itself more able to directly confront de Gaulle

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<sup>90</sup> Pierre Dominique, "Waterloo, Waterloo, morne pleine..." *Rivarol* 9 décembre 1965. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>91</sup> "Editorial," *Rivarol* 16 December 1965; "Quoi que vous pensiez de son concurrent, votez contre de Gaulle!" *Rivarol* 16 December 1965.



and to argue for the implementation of their own idea of France.<sup>92</sup> But the discourse they used as they continued to protest the war and clamor for a change in France's international actions around the war drew from the dialogue they had begun while challenging de Gaulle during 1965. The debates raised on the left and the right over what France's role in the world should be put into play questions of what French national identity should be, showing that both groups refused to simply accept de Gaulle's presentation of France to the world. The John-P. Serter may have been correct that the French left, faced with de Gaulle's power, were among "the wretched of the Earth," but he was mistaken when he claimed they were so enamored with de Gaulle's foreign policy they could no longer adequately challenge him. Although not always successful, for the left and for the right criticisms of de Gaulle's foreign policy, primarily in Vietnam, were the gateway for challenging, as Serter had said, "the entirety of Gaullist politics."

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<sup>92</sup> I discuss left-wing protest movements further in the following chapters.

## Chapter Two

### **For Whom "The Heart of the French People Beats:" Unity, Division and the Development of Vietnam War Protest Groups in France, 1966**

In July of 1966, the French Communist Party's paper *L'Humanité* published an article exulting over recent activity in France against the Vietnam War. The past seven months, they noted, had been filled with non-stop protests. "Not a day goes by," the editorial board crowed, "without *L'Humanité* [receiving] information talking about the continual fight undertaken in our country for the support of the Vietnamese people, for ending American aggression in South Vietnam [...]" In February, 15,000 Parisians had answered the Party's call to protest the escalation of fighting by delivering petitions to the U.S. Consulate. More than 100,000 protestors had responded to the Communist-led Mouvement de la Paix's three-day protest in March, staging rallies in 125 towns. Fifty thousand French women had participated in multiple "Peace Vigils" organized by the Communist Union des Femmes Françaises (Union of French Women). The Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communiste (Communist Youth Movement) had drawn 70,000 to meetings in May. When the U.S. bombed Haiphong and Hanoi in June, 30,000 people descended on the place de la Concorde to protest. On the Fourth of July, the Communists joined up with two university groups, the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire (University Intersyndical Collective) and the Union Nationale des Etudiants de France (National Union of French Students) and a group of American expatriates, the Paris American Committee to Stopwar (PACS), to march from the Madeleine Church to the U.S.

Consulate. "Not a week passes without actions of the masses expressing, in diverse forms, this will of the Communists, [who are] participating in the front ranks," the paper remarked, noting that the protests also demonstrated "the will of hundreds of thousands of French people of varying opinions and conditions." The meaning was clear, the paper proclaimed: "It is for the invincible and courageous Vietnamese people that the heart of the French people beats."<sup>1</sup>

1966 saw a decisive increase in Vietnam War protest movements in France. In addition to the efforts of the French Communist Party, new organizations, particularly in universities, sprang up, drawing both on the far left and the far right, to coordinate petition signings, lectures, and public protests against and for the American presence in Vietnam. Barbara and John Ehrenreich, writing in 1969, noted that the war revived some of the political activism that had fallen by the wayside since the Algerian War ended. "For the first time in years," they remarked, "there was an issue which could rally apolitical and liberal students, as well as the ideologically committed." But the Ehrenreichs saw the Vietnam War protests in France as distinct from actual French life: "an easy evasion of domestic issues," they deemed it. With de Gaulle already against the war, the students' protests did not challenge the existing order. Students who protested, they argued, could "talk and even act militantly without ever confronting the power of the state or of established Left organizations such as the giant Communist party."<sup>2</sup>

While the Ehrenreichs correctly noted that Vietnam War protests captured some of the enthusiasm of past Algerian War protestors, they were wrong in assuming that the

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<sup>1</sup> "1966: Sept mois d'action persévérante pour le soutien au peuple vietnamien," *L'Humanité* 29 July 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara and John Ehrenreich, *Long March, Short Spring: The Student Uprising at Home and Abroad* (MR: New York, 1969): 74-75.

focus on the Vietnam War existed separate from contemporary French issues. As Nicolas Pas has shown in his excellent dissertation, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste," students on the non-Communist left used their participation in Vietnam protests to take a stand against the Communist Party's dominance of left-wing politics.<sup>3</sup> Yet the developing protest groups revealed more than a gap between the Communist Party and the left. Conflicts during protests demonstrated other splits within the left as well, while highlighting the growing acrimony and violence between those on the far right and those on the left and the dynamic of expected violence this was creating. Protest actions also reacted to and acted upon de Gaulle's stand on Vietnam and his standing in France, offering a forum for criticism that moved beyond the debates of political parties.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, groups on both the left and the right used their protests to argue over interpretations of French history and of France's current role in the world. Through an examination of the development of large left-wing groups such as the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire and the Comité Vietnam National, as well as right-wing groups such as the student group Occident, this chapter shows that Vietnam War-based demonstrations were not simply a response to developments in South-East Asia or an escapist measure that allowed protestors to play at social change without addressing the situation in their own country. Rather, the surge of Vietnam War protest groups in 1966 played an essential role in establishing cleavages in French political life, highlighting the

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<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche française sur la guerre du Vietnam 1965-1968," Introduction. Because the copy of the dissertation I have does not include page numbers, I will instead reference the section of the dissertation used.

<sup>4</sup> The protests also affected de Gaulle internationally, particularly in his relations with the United States, as Pierre Journoud shows in his exhaustively researched doctoral dissertation.

growing radicalization of fringe groups and the on-going battle over French national identity.

### **The "Sentiments of the Majority of Paris:" The PCF and Early Protests**

The Communist Party exercised, as Marc Lazar put it, a "quasi-hegemony" over early protest activities.<sup>5</sup> Throughout 1965, in conjunction with their electoral struggle, they organized a series of public demonstrations, petition signings, peace vigils, and marches to the American Embassy off the Place de la Concorde. Calls to participate placed these actions within the challenge to de Gaulle's foreign policy. A 1965 resolution of the Union des étudiants communistes (Communist Student Union, henceforth UEC) calling for increased Communist protests claimed that "diverse imperialist contradictions" motivated de Gaulle to condemn the American effort, but his "declarations did not become acts."<sup>6</sup> Through their protests, they encouraged participants to push de Gaulle to take serious actions such as the diplomatic recognition of North Vietnam. At a protest organized by the Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communiste (Communist Youth Movement) in February 1965, Roland Leroy of the Central Committee denounced the French government for shirking its responsibility as a signatory of the Geneva Accords, and arguing that the government should go farther and do more -- for example, offering formal protests to the American government, as the Communists were doing by presenting a motion condemning U.S. action in Vietnam to

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<sup>5</sup> Marc Lazar, "Le Parti communiste français et l'action de solidarité avec le Vietnam," 243.

<sup>6</sup> "Résolution du comité national de l'union des étudiants communistes sur le VIETNAM," 27-28 March 1965. CHS Fonds Grobla Carton E.

the American Consulate.<sup>7</sup> The protests tied in with editorial commentary and other denunciations of Gaullist foreign policy in an attempt to establish the Communist left as an alternative to the Gaullist vision of the world.

These early protest activities also worked to tie Vietnam War protests into an ongoing narrative of French leftist history. A January 1965 front-page photo of a Vietnamese woman working in the fields appeared under the title "*Amie, si tu tombes, un ami sort de l'ombre...*" ("Friend, if you fall, another friend comes out of the shadows...") - a famous line from "Les Partisans," a song written in London during World War II that became the anthem of the *maquis* of the French resistance.<sup>8</sup> Its use with the photo of a Vietnamese woman connected the *maquis* of the Vietcong to the French *maquis* -- which had had large numbers of Communist members -- while simultaneously indicating the strength of the Vietcong (if one went down, another was waiting) and implying that the French Communists stood ready to support them (if the Vietcong went down, the French Communist "ami" would step in). The PCF also invoked memories of the Algerian War. When members of a Communist led union of dockers decided to donate one day of pay to helping the Vietnamese, *L'Humanité* noted proudly that they had "solid traditions of anticolonial fights" and reminded its readers these dockers had refused to load material "intended for use in the *sale guerre* (dirty war)" when the Algerian War raged in 1953.<sup>9</sup> Communists even drew a connection between the failed 1871 attempt to establish a

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<sup>7</sup> "Vendredi à 18h 30, la jeunesse communiste invite à manifester devant l'ambassade américaine," *Le Monde* 13 February 1965.

<sup>8</sup> "'Amie, si tu tombes un ami sort de l'ombre...'" *L'Humanité* 19 January 1965. For more information on the history of the song "Les Partisans," see the French government website [http://www.archives.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/juppe\\_version1/HIST/PARTISAN.HTM](http://www.archives.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/juppe_version1/HIST/PARTISAN.HTM), which provides the full lyrics in French. The *maquis* which adopted the song had large numbers of Communist members.

<sup>9</sup> "La solidarité des travailleurs du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais," *L'Humanité* 1 septembre 1965.

Commune in France and contemporary activities for Vietnam. Describing a commemorative march past the Communards' Wall in Paris' Père Lachaise cemetery, where in 1871 leaders of the Commune had been brutally lined up and shot, Jacques Kahn waxed lyrical for *L'Humanité* about the juxtaposition of past and present revolutions. The last group of marchers -- which, he noted, was from the working-class 20th *arrondissement* of Paris -- stopped before passing the wall, grouping themselves together "shoulder to shoulder, a living wall of cohesion and warm force." Continuing their walk, they sang out the end of the *International*: "Workers, peasants, we are/ The great party of the workers" as the crowd behind them yelled out "Peace in Vietnam!" Combining the historic song of Communist revolution, the location of a past Communist uprising, and the support for a contemporary Communist action in a different country led Kahn to sigh that the whole event signified an "undying fraternity."<sup>10</sup>

For the Communists, 1966 dawned optimistically, imbued with the same sense of brotherhood and dedication to those fighting against the United States in Vietnam. As he closed one of the first large PCF meetings of the year, Party chairman Waldeck Rochet reminded his fellow Communists that "the people of France have, in fact, particular reasons to bring their active support to this grand fight for Vietnamese independence and for peace." These "particular reasons" included both France's status as a signatory of the Geneva Accords and France's international ties to socialist countries. Given French obligations, Waldeck Rochet explained, the French Communist Party, "along with its central organ *L'Humanité* and by all means" intended to increase its efforts to "unmask the aggressive policies of American imperialism and to develop popular mass protest in

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<sup>10</sup> Jacques Kahn, "Des milliers de parisiens ont défilé devant le Mur des fédérés," *L'Humanité* 31 May 1965.

all its forms."<sup>11</sup> Working with a number of umbrella groups, including the Mouvement de la Paix (Peace Movement), the Union des Etudiants Communistes (Communist Student Union, hereafter UEC), the Union des Femmes Françaises (French Women's Union), and the Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communiste, the Communists quickly set about organizing more activities.

In presentations of their protests, the Communists portrayed their actions as representative of French sentiments as a whole. When groups massed in front of the American Embassy on February 3rd to protest an increase in bombing, *L'Humanité* described the resulting "choir of 15,000 voices" as a sort of *tout-Paris* -- but the "real" *tout-Paris* of working and everyday folks, not a distant elite. "For an hour [...] Paris demonstrated its solidarity with the people of Vietnam," *L'Humanité* wrote, "cried out, to the point of losing their voice, their indignation against American aggression [...] beat their hands in rhythm for the victory of these heroic people." The group that came out represented "the Paris of the factories, of offices, of universities, of schools [...] with the young people, so many young people, among the most ardent, the most fervent [...]" Delivering a prepared statement condemning the bombings, Party member Raymond Guyot insisted his view "express[ed] the sentiments of the immense majority of the population of Paris and the suburbs[.]"<sup>12</sup> Claiming a popular mandate was key: for the Communists, it was essential to position themselves at the center of French Vietnam War-related action.

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<sup>11</sup> "Le discours de clôture de Waldeck Rochet (au Comité Central de Saint-Ouen)," *L'Humanité* 6 January 1966.

<sup>12</sup> "Choeur à 15.000 voix aux abords de l'ambassade américaine: Paix au Vietnam! Paix au Vietnam!" *L'Humanité* 4 February 1966.



## **"A Particular Obligation to Speak Up and Act": Academics, Students and Protest Movements**

In spite of their claims to pre-eminence in protests, the Communists were far from alone in opposing the U.S. war effort. In addition to protests run by rival political groups such as the Parti Socialiste Unifié, a strong movement also developed in the universities, where, as the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire noted, "faced with war, the academics and the students of our country have never been indifferent."<sup>13</sup> Formed in 1965, the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire [University Intersyndical Collective, henceforth CIU] operated as an umbrella organization, coordinating the anti-Vietnam War activities of three of the major academic unions in France: the Syndicat National des Chercheurs [National Researchers' Syndicate], the Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur [National Higher Education Syndicate, henceforth "SNESup"] and the Union National des Etudiants de France [the National Student Union of France, henceforth "UNEF."].<sup>14</sup> Its members consisted of professors, researchers, and students, coming from a variety of prestigious institutions in France.<sup>15</sup> They included some names well-known both in academia and in activism, such as the professor Laurent Schwartz, who was a Fields

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<sup>13</sup> J.M. Legay, D. Lahalle, J.F. Nallet, "Editorial," *Bulletin du Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur*, Octobre 1965. The Parti Socialiste Unifié's members would participate in a number of groups before becoming closely aligned with the Comité Vietnam National.

<sup>14</sup> A UNEF document indicates that the idea for the collective first came about in May or June 1965 with consolidation of the group over the years of 1965-1966. The CIU was completely self-financed and highly organized, with weekly meetings of its central committee and monthly meetings of its larger "Plenary Assembly." It concentrated on inter-university work and on contact with academics abroad. "Union nationale des étudiants de France," December 1966, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.

<sup>15</sup> A list of members on an early CIU document showed connections to the following institutions: the Faculté de Droit et des Sciences économiques de Paris, the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, the faculté des Lettres et des Sciences humaines de Paris, the Faculté de Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Nanterre, the Faculté des lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bordeaux, the Faculté des Sciences d'Orsay, the Collège de France, the Observatoire de Paris, and the Musée National d'histoire naturelle. CIU to "Monsieur le Professeur," Paris, 1 June 1965, CAC 20000529 art 2.

medal recipient for his work in Mathematics and who had at one point lost his university job due to his protest activities against the French war in Algeria.<sup>16</sup> Although all leftist in political orientation, members belonged to a multitude of political parties.

Early protests organized by the Collective centered on attempts to educate others on the war and on Vietnamese history. Drawing on its academic strengths, these meetings featured lectures by academic experts such as Jean Chesneaux, who had extensively studied and written on French Indochina.<sup>17</sup> The Collective found particular inspiration in the activities of American academics, whose efforts "held their attention and demanded their sympathy."<sup>18</sup> Attempting to demonstrate French "support" and "solidarity," the group organized protest efforts in France, including an "International University Week Against the Vietnam War" from November 18-25, 1965.<sup>19</sup> Intended as a "week of information and discussion," the CIU hoped to involve both academics and the "general public" and to encourage a "confrontation of opinions" that would lead to "new forms of action" against the war.<sup>20</sup> In the CIU's view, academics were uniquely situated as protesters. As scientific researchers, they "less than anyone else could tolerate the perversion of science" that the American uses of gas and alleged torture in Vietnam

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<sup>16</sup> Schwartz gave an excellent overview of his protest activities and his mathematical work in his autobiography, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, trans. S. Schepner (Boston: Birkhauser-Verlag Basel, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> "Meeting universitaire contre la guerre au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 22 May 1965.

<sup>18</sup> Union National des étudiants de France: "AFGES: Table Ronde," no date, BDIC F delta 1081/17; the same announcement was also sent to newspapers. "Semaine universitaire en France contre la guerre du Vietnam," *Le Monde* 6 November 1965, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Flyer, "L'Université contre la guerre au Vietnam," no date, CAC 20000529 art 2.

<sup>20</sup> J.M. Legay, D. Lahalle, and J.F. Nallet, "Editorial,"; "Semaine universitaire en France contre la guerre du Vietnam," *Le Monde*; Alfred Kastler, "Les Universitaires devant l'escalade," *Le Monde* 20 November 1965.

produced.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, they explained, "university faculty members, because of the objectivity they owe to the scientific character of their research and because of the responsibility they hold in shaping the young," faced a "moral obligation" to work for peace in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to the Communists, the CIU inscribed itself within a French leftist history of protest against colonial wars. In particular, the Collective emphasized the importance of academics' actions in affecting wars' outcomes. An early recruiting letter sent out to universities in France and abroad reminded readers that little time had passed since France itself possessed colonies, and that numerous academics "took part in the initiatives which helped to end [the first war in Indochina], as they did later on with the war in Algeria."<sup>23</sup> Not everyone agreed their actions had been beneficial. A "Professor Dr. CGCJ" returned their letter with the note "In reply to your printed circular of June 1st, 1965, regarding Vietnam Day, I may remind you that France would still be Vichy-France, and Europe under the heel of Hitler if it had not been for the Americans. Never forget that!"<sup>24</sup> Another wrote to specify he would not join their protest, claiming they supported dangerous subversion.<sup>25</sup> One recipient returned the letter with the section mentioning

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<sup>21</sup> Secrétariat de l'UNEF, "Union nationale des étudiants de France," December 1966, BDIC 4 delta 11.

<sup>22</sup> CIU to "Monsieur le Professeur." It should be noted that their proclaimed objectivity was not believed by everyone. In response to the June 1 letter, which was addressed to various university workers to encourage them to protest, Dr. Michel Jéquier wrote back to announce that he would not be joining their group, and that in focusing only on American actions, their views were "particularly fragmentary and tendentious." Dr. Michel Jéquier to Madeleine Réberieux, Lausanne, 6 July 1965, CAC 20000529 art 2.

<sup>23</sup> CIU to "Monsieur le Professeur."

<sup>24</sup> Professor Dr CGGJ van Steenis to Madame Reberieux, Oegstgeest, July 14 1965, CAC 20000529 art 2

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Michel Jéquier to Madeleine Réberieux.

Algeria circled in red and "Bunch of fucking assholes!!" written on the margin.<sup>26</sup> Yet this did not hinder the Collective. The rapid spread of Vietnam protests through the University community could be seen in an August 4, 1965 *Nouvel Observateur* cartoon, where a professor's disembodied head mused to himself "I've been teaching at University for five years. My students like me. My colleagues appreciate me. Journals speak well of my work. My position seems unassailable." And yet, the head complained, "no one has asked me to sign a petition for peace in Vietnam. Where could I have gone wrong?"<sup>27</sup>

Left-wing students at the universities displayed similar interest in organizing protests. In addition to its participation in the CIU, the UNEF continued to work on its own, aiming its actions at drawing in the youth. As part of their vision of "giving more publicity to our protest movement and spreading it to all youth, and not just to students," the UNEF sent out feelers in February 1966 about the possibility of organizing a concert tour by the "well-known" singer, "model for an entire category of artists right now": "Bob Bylan." Their aim, they said, was to get "Bob Bylan" to France not for a "traditional gala" but for a "protest meeting."<sup>28</sup> Unable to contact him (perhaps due to spelling errors), the effort came to nothing, but it indicated the desire of the UNEF to expand the audience of their protests and their realization -- similar to the Communists -- of the importance of youth backing. This awareness was not limited to the students' union. In mid-February, members of various youth-centered groups banded together to form an "action committee against the Vietnam War." They intended to centralize their activities to give them more

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<sup>26</sup> CAC 20000529 art 2

<sup>27</sup> Feiffer, untitled cartoon, *Le Nouvel Observateur* 4 August 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Bernet (VP of UNEF) to "Chers Camarades", Paris, le 4 février 1966, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.

force. As did the Communists, the Committee considered their actions as a challenge to the dominance of Gaullist former policy, noting in a release that "We can in no way be content with just approving Gaullist policy; its objectives are not ours and the apparent coincidences between his positions and those of the left can only be ephemeral."<sup>29</sup>

Although their announcement did not directly reference the Communist Party, the Committee's constitution nonetheless challenged PCF power over the left by presenting an alternative to Gaullist foreign policy originating from outside of the Communist Party's own groups.

A more serious threat to the PCF arose from the party's own former members, however. In 1965, the Communist Student Union (UEC) had undergone a severe purging. In two waves, it singled out members harboring sympathies for the Italian Communist Party philosophies -- the so-called "Italians" -- and members who had been drawn to Trotskysm.<sup>30</sup> The exclusion created, in the words of Nicolas Pas, "a diaspora of active young militants" looking for a new cause right as the Vietnam War caught more attention.<sup>31</sup> The Trotskyist members, grouped around Alain Krivine, quickly formed themselves into a new group called the "Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire" (Revolutionary Communist Youth, henceforth JCR). In one of their introductory texts, they placed the Vietnam War at the center of their interests, proclaiming that "the

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<sup>29</sup> "A Paris, plusieurs responsables de mouvements de jeunes créent un comité contre la guerre," *Le Monde* 26 February 1966. The group included members of the Mouvement rural des jeunesses catholiques; the Jeunesse universitaire chrétienne; former members of the UEC; and a former president of the UNEF. There are no later mentions of the committee, although several of its members (notably Kahn, Schalit, and Boulte) show up as members of the Comité Vietnam National in 1967.

<sup>30</sup> Pas, Chapter 1. A third purge in early 1966 would get rid of Maoist members of the UEC. These Maoists would constitute their own Vietnam committees -- the "Comités Vietnam de Base" -- in early 1967, and become a formidable part of the anti-war campaign in France. Their activities are discussed in depth in later chapters.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

struggle against the war in Vietnam will be, in the months to come, one of the essential axes of our combat[.]" Challenging the Communists' control over the anti-war movement, the group stated that "the JCR should take the lead on all initiatives aiming to explain and denounce American aggression and to popularize the character of the Vietnamese revolution."<sup>32</sup> As various committees grew, it was becoming clear that while the PCF might have seen itself as the center of anti-war activities, other groups on the left did not agree.

### **"All Partisans of Peace Are Invited to Work Together:" Early Divisions and the March 25, 1966 Protests**

Although the left-wing groups supported the same cause, the presence of so many protesting at once quickly made the old adage of "too many cooks" seem true. This was not to say that the left was incapable of working together. The *Tribune Socialiste* described an April 24, 1966, demonstration resulting from joint efforts of the Saint-Denis section of the PCF, the PSU, the SFIO, and the Parti Radical, which after some negotiation over a mutually agreeable date ran smoothly. Supported by the original groups joined by the Mouvement Contre l'Armement Atomique (the Movement Against Atomic Arms, or MCAA), the groups sent out "forty cars, decorated with posters calling for peace in Vietnam," which drove around the central parts of town in a pouring rainstorm. Reflecting proudly on the successful outing which "took place in the most perfect order," the *Tribune* hoped that "this action, like all the others undertaken in France, will be an encouragement for the Vietnamese in their just fight for independence and for the American pacifists." Working together, the groups felt they had been able to make a stand that helped publicly express their desire "to finally see the end of the

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<sup>32</sup> "Editorial," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* May-June 1966.

massacre of an entire country."<sup>33</sup> (This did not, however, mean that their message actually got through: a joint protest by the Mouvement de la Paix, the PCF, the UNEF, and the CIU on June 30th found their delegation to the American Embassy met by staffers who would only repeat over and over again "We don't speak French."<sup>34</sup>)

Despite these instances of unity, multi-group protests often ran into difficulties which highlighted the PCF's intransigence, the growing radicalization of parts of the left, and the differing views on how France should participate in international calls for peace. As early as December 1965, complaints emerged about the Communist Party's insistence on portraying itself as in control. Multiple student groups had organized a protest in Paris on November 26th, intended to coincide with the CIU's "Action Week" for Vietnam.<sup>35</sup> From their gathering place in the Sorbonne, they headed out towards Châtelet. Marching along, they yelled out slogans such as "US go home!" and "Johnson Assassin!," cheered as they went by former presidential candidate François Mitterand, whose headquarters they passed. The group then listened to a speech by UNEF head Michel Rostain before splitting up and heading for home.<sup>36</sup> In *Tribune Socialiste*, the Socialist Students' Union praised the joint effort as a demonstration of the "growing awareness among students of the primordial importance of the problem of imperialism." They argued, however, that the article in *L'Humanité*, which presented the protest as the brainchild of the Communist

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<sup>33</sup> "Manifestation pour la paix au Vietnam," *Tribune Socialiste* 7 May 1966.

<sup>34</sup> Fernand Chatel, Daniel Materne, Charles Silvestre, "25,000 manifestants place de la Concorde," *L'Humanité* 1 July 1966.

<sup>35</sup> "Vendredi: Manifestation au quartier latin contre la guerre du Vietnam," *Le Monde* 26 November 1965.

<sup>36</sup> Le secrétariat des ESU, "Les étudiants contre la guerre au Vietnam," *Tribune Socialiste* 4 December 1965; Jean Rocchi, "De Chatelet aux Grands-Boulevards: 3,500 jeunes manifestent pour la paix au Vietnam," *L'Humanité* 27 November 1965.

Students' Union, was a step backwards for the antiwar movement. "It's certainly not by acting like that," the paper remarked, "that we can best move towards unity."<sup>37</sup>

Unity appeared on the agenda again when the Communist-led Mouvement de la Paix issued calls for protests in France to coincide with American protests on March 25, 26, and 27 of 1966. For this "International Solidarity Week," the Mouvement de la Paix encouraged participants to plan "local actions, meetings, delegations to the US embassy and consulate, film showings," and to sign a French-written petition to be delivered to President Johnson. Significantly, they phrased their call as open to all interested in opposing the war. "All peaceful forces in each town or *département*," the press release noted, "all partisans of peace are invited to work together for the preparation and success of these days."<sup>38</sup> Interest quickly spread. By March 4, *L'Humanité* announced that nineteen groups had joined the planning; by March 11, there were twenty-four.<sup>39</sup>

Numerous "personalities" (French members of the cultural elite), including philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch and writer Marguerite Duras, voiced their support, and the protest

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<sup>37</sup> Le secrétariat des ESU, "Les étudiants contre la guerre au Vietnam."

<sup>38</sup> "Manifestations les 25, 26 et 27 mars pour la paix au Vietnam," *L'Humanité* 7 February 1966.

<sup>39</sup> "Pour la paix au Vietnam: 19 organisations appellent à une manifestation le 25 mars à Paris," *L'Humanité* 4 March 1966; "24 organisations de la région parisienne: Pour la paix au Vietnam délégations massives le 25 mars à partir de 18h30 à l'ambassade US," *L'Humanité* 11 March 1966. By the actual demonstration day, twenty-five organizations had joined in: Fédération de la région parisienne du MCAA, association d'amitié franco-vietnamienne; Union départementale des syndicats CGT, UNEF, Fédération de la Seine du PCF, du PSU, de l'Union progressiste, de la Jeune République; Amis de Témoignage Chrétien de la région parisienne, Mouvement du Christianisme social; UFF; Confédération syndicale des Familles (région parisienne); Mouvement de la Jeunesse communiste de la région parisienne (UJCF, UJFF, UEC), Etudiants Socialistes unifiés; Union des étudiants juifs de France; Secrétariat national de la Jeunesse Universitaire chrétienne; Union départementale de la Seine de l'UFAC, Fédération de la Seine de l'ARAC, Association des combattants prisonniers de guerre de la Seine; Amicale des veuves, orphelins, ascendants de guerre; fédération des groupements d'ACVG de la RATP; Association départementale des déportés du travail et réfractaires. "Demain, première des trois journées de manifestations décidées par le mouvement de la paix. A Paris, les délégations se retrouveront à 18h30, place de la Concorde." *L'Humanité* 24 March 1966.



spread to multiple areas across France.<sup>40</sup> By the time the end of March arrived, *L'Humanité* could proudly proclaim that protests were taking place in 110 towns and in 35 *départements*.<sup>41</sup> Yves Moreau presented the action as France standing up for its own defense, noting "The Pentagon [...] has not hidden that it considers the Vietnam War as a 'testing ground.' The continuing escalation can only lead to the expansion of hostilities. In shouting out our disapproval of American aggression, " he therefore concluded, "we are defending the security of our home."<sup>42</sup>

In Paris, the main demonstration occurred on March 25th, consisting of a gathering in front of the American Embassy, delivery of petitions to the ambassador, and a march through the neighboring streets. Student groups gathered first at the Sorbonne before moving to join the larger group at the Place de la Concorde. As a delegation entered the American Embassy to present "a letter demanding the end of the war," protestors numbering somewhere between 20,000 (*L'Humanité*) and 3,000 (the *New York Times*) chanted slogans outside, crying out "Peace in Vietnam!" "U.S. Go Home!" and "U.S. Assassins!"<sup>43</sup> After speeches by group leaders, the mass marched down to the Opéra, brandishing posters emblazoned with slogans such as "Immediate End to American Aggression," "Immediate End to Attacks Against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," and "FNL, Only True Representative of South Vietnam." *L'Humanité*

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<sup>40</sup> "A Paris, de nombreuses personnalités soutiennent l'initiative du Mouvement de la Paix et de 25 autres organisations," *L'Humanité* 25 March 1966.

<sup>41</sup> "Dans 110 villes et 35 départements," *L'Humanité* 25 March 1966.

<sup>42</sup> Yves Moreau, "Le Cri des peuples," *L'Humanité* 25 March 1966.

<sup>43</sup> Fernand Chatel, Jacques Kahn, Raymond Pradines, "Paix au Vietnam: Puissante manifestation à la Concorde," *L'Humanité* 26 March 1966; "Paris Students Protest," *New York Times* 26 March 1966. *Le Monde* counted 6,000 protestors: "Manifestations en faveur de la paix à Paris et en province," *Le Monde* 27-28 March 1966.

described "innumerable" Mouvement de la Paix posters held high by hands, calling for "Peace in Vietnam!"<sup>44</sup> The protest, which the *New York Times* deemed "rather orderly," offered to the Communists proof of their ability to connect organizations and tie in to the international movement against the war. "Thanks to the initiative originating from the Mouvement de la Paix," *L'Humanité* exulted, "during these three days [...] our country's people proclaims with force the demand that today in the United States numerous Americans are demanding in their turn."<sup>45</sup> The protest appeared an unqualified success.

Yet descriptions of the protest from the new student group the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire demonstrated serious divisions within the anti-war movement, both in how protest should be handled and in the ideological aims of the protestors. "The way this rally unrolled, as well as the lack of preparation in the [protest group] sections, shows that the directors of the PCF don't want [...]to organize the struggle against U.S. imperialism," the JCR complained. They accused the PCF of "colluding" with police forces to keep protestors well-behaved and orderly. One protestor claimed to have overheard a Communist leader telling an officer "We have to keep this meeting from degenerating into the protest desired by the *gauchistes*." But the JCR gloated that the Communists had been unable to silence the students, who had brought an NLF flag with them and began a chant of "Arms to Vietnam!," a direct challenge to the calmer official call by the Mouvement de la Paix, "Peace in Vietnam." Contrary to *L'Humanité's* description of the "crowd vibrating [as the] flag of the NLF glided gently to the rue St. Florentin," the JCR told of student groups refusing Communist orders to

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<sup>44</sup> Fernand Chatel, Jacques Kahn, Raymond Pradines, "Paix au Vietnam: Puissante manifestation à la Concorde," *L'Humanité* 26 March 1966.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

disperse at the Tuileries and breaking off themselves to head towards the rue St. Florentin, forcing protest organizers to have to run frantically after them in order to get to the head of the group and appear as though they were leading the movement. The JCR claimed the rebel protestors largely ignored the organizers' instructions, deliberately letting the leaders -- once they'd caught up -- "walk about ten or twelve meters in front of the real head of the group, as if they were people in no way connected to the [protest.]" When the prestigious Communist reporter Madeleine Riffaud, recently returned from two months spent with the Vietcong, attempted to call for an end to the protest at the Opéra, the JCR claimed the protestors whistled at her before singing the "International" over her speech. It was, they claimed, the police who finally convinced the protestors to leave. The day opened the eyes of the JCR members, who now realized that the organizers "had no intention of doing whatever it takes to put an end to the war in Vietnam." Their very organization and insistence on unity, calmness and cooperation had damned them in the eyes of the more militant leftists, who were looking for a more active denouncement of American activities. "Bad day for bureaucrats," the JCR noted.<sup>46</sup>

**"A Particular Obligation to Speak and Act:"  
New Forms of Protest and Unity and the First "Six Hours for Vietnam,"  
26 May 1966**

A desire for more dynamic protests permeated the non-Communist left beyond the *gauchistes* of the JCR as well. In the spring, its most vibrant manifestation came in the May 26th protest "Six Hours for Vietnam," organized by the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire and featuring a roster of well-known French names, including Jean-Paul

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<sup>46</sup> Fédération sud-est de la JCR, Bouches du Rhone, Var, Alpes-Maritimes, " "Manifestation" du 25 mars à Paris devant l'Ambassade Américaine," undated, BDIC F delta 1061/2.

Sartre. "We can not remain silent," the twenty-one "personalities" at the center of the initiative proclaimed in their initial call for the Six Hours meeting. Arguing that the American war effort had become more and more "inhuman," they called for "the union of all forces who, in France and in the world, notably in the United States, fight against the Vietnam War and support the fight of the South Vietnamese people for their independence, under the direction of the National Liberation Front."<sup>47</sup> Declaring that "[a]cademics, students, and French intellectuals remember the traditions of the times of the first war in Vietnam and the Algerian War," they stated they "could not rest indifferent" and encouraged participation in their teach-in style, six-hour long meeting at the Mutualité in Paris.<sup>48</sup> The set-up of the protest showed the expanding interest in protesting the war, the need to move beyond delegations and petitions, along with a continued sense of French historical connections and contemporary obligations to fighting against the war.

"This will be the longest protest ever organized, in France, against the Vietnam War: from 6PM to midnight, Thursday May 26th, at the Mutualité," Olivier Todd enthused in *Le Nouvel Observateur*. "This will not simply be a night of speeches."<sup>49</sup> In fact, the organizers intended for the meeting to help "renew our traditional styles of action." The six hours were symbolic, expressing "our anguished sense of the length of the conflict -- and of the continuity of the action we want to lead."<sup>50</sup> To inspire new styles of protest, the CIU put together a combination workshop and cultural spectacle. Four

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<sup>47</sup> "Manifestation contre la guerre jeudi prochain à la Mutualité," *Le Monde* 21 May 1966.

<sup>48</sup> "Jeudi à la Mutualité: Un appel pour la manifestation 'Six Heures pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 25 May 1966.

<sup>49</sup> Olivier Todd, "Six heures pour le Vietnam," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 25-31 May 1966.

<sup>50</sup> "Jeudi à la Mutualité: Un appel pour la manifestation 'Six Heures pour le Vietnam.'" "

colloquiums on different topics ("American Imperialism in South-East Asia," "French Policy Towards the Vietnamese Problem," "The Situation in Vietnam," and "The Struggle Against the Vietnam War in the World,") were bookended by a documentary on Vietnam, the premiere of a Joris Ivens film on the war, "Le Ciel et la terre," and performances by French singers including Hugues Aufray, famous for singing French versions of Bob Dylan songs. Paintings on the war by American, Vietnamese and French artists hung from the walls of the Mutualité for participants to admire, and well-known members of the Parisian theater world such as Armand Gatti and Roger Blin had announced their attendance. International figures from both Vietnam and the United States spoke.<sup>51</sup> The event, intended to draw attention and force reflection, worked to push French protest to the next level. As the organizers put it, "This association of political reflection and cultural expression, which makes up the originality of this protest, is very significant: our protest against the war is total."<sup>52</sup>

Several thousand people, in majority "students and young people," showed up to participate in the six hour teach-in.<sup>53</sup> *L'Humanité* described participants grouped outside waiting to get in, blocking the sidewalk outside the Mutualité and causing the proceedings to get off to a late start.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the evening, organizers emphasized the importance of French activism to ending the war in Vietnam. Professor Steven Smale of U.C.

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<sup>51</sup> Olivier Todd, "Six heures pour le Vietnam;" "Jeudi à la Mutualité: Un appel pour la manifestation 'Six Heures pour le Vietnam.'" "

<sup>52</sup> "Jeudi à la Mutualité: Un appel pour la manifestation 'Six Heures pour le Vietnam.'" "

<sup>53</sup> "Jeudi soir à la Mutualité, la manifestation 'Six heures pour le Vietnam' a réuni plusieurs milliers de participants," *Le Monde* 28 May 1966.

<sup>54</sup> " "Six Heures Pour le Vietnam" hier soir à la Mutualité," *L'Humanité* 27 May 1966.

Berkeley, invited to speak, exhorted the French to believe their participation mattered. "In France, people have asked me if a meeting like this can have any influence," he said. "I say with force: Yes! What happens in Vietnam concerns the entire world. There is a question we must ask ourselves: can the American war machine succeed in keeping a country from deciding its own destiny? We must have a unified action respond: No!"<sup>55</sup> Roger Blin, reading a declaration agreed upon by the twenty-one personalities who had called the protest, further underlined the importance of French participation and of new styles of protest. He declared first that the protest was not simply an emotional call, stating "the organizations and the 'personalities' who have joined their efforts here to ask the French people to reflect for six hours on the reasons and consequences of the Vietnam War and to then mobilize themselves to fight for peace over there do not want to limit themselves to an appeal to your pity, to your imagination, to your heart." Rather, he argued, the French needed to act from a rational, fact-centered base, and part of that base included admitting that France was responsible in part for the war's outbreak. France's colonization had provoked the Vietnamese people's resistance, and France had brought "the most atrocious forms of war, introduced in France by the nazis," to Vietnam. This gave the French, Blin argued, "a particular obligation to speak and act."<sup>56</sup>

The declaration of the twenty-one then went on to place French protest within a leftist tradition of action and to argue that unity on the left and new, more decisive actions were needed to make an impact. Vietnam, they argued, held the same

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<sup>55</sup> "Discours du professeur Smale de l'Université Berkeley (Californie)," *Bulletin de l'Information: Collectif Intersyndical d'Action pour la Paix au Vietnam*, July 1966..

<sup>56</sup> "Six Heures pour le Vietnam," *Bulletin de l'Information: Collectif Intersyndical d'Action pour la Paix au Vietnam*, July 1966.

ramifications for peace in the world as had the civil war in Spain previously. "In France," the declaration stated, "it is indispensable that the ensemble of forces on the left feel concerned by the bombs falling in Vietnam, as, thirty years ago, the bombs which fell on Guernica concerned western democracies." The organizers asked the left to come together and particularly to "put pressure on the French government so that it assumes the obligations it took in signing the Geneva Accords, and to make it recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." They ended by insisting on the need to use the new knowledge received for good. "We are gathered here not only to proclaim our solidarity, but to live it," the twenty-one declared. "What is at stake is pulling the Vietnamese people from their torturers, is defending everywhere the right of men to take their destiny in hand." They closed with an encouragement for further action. "Our obligation here, and beyond these walls, in this moment and tomorrow, is to engage ourselves with all of the solemnity of a well-thought out decision, but also with passion, to make sure that the Vietnamese people can finally retake their rights, all their rights, in the arena of the world's people."<sup>57</sup> As Blin finished reading the declaration, *Le Monde* reported, the audience burst spontaneously into "L'Internationale," singing together with their fists raised in the air.<sup>58</sup>

The Six Hours protest set the bar for new protest activities, and inspired some of its members to insure joint action would continue. A group of 'personalities,' including a number of organizers Six Hours for Vietnam, issued a call to create "support committees

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> "Jeudi soir à la Mutualité, la manifestation 'Six heures pour le Vietnam' a réuni plusieurs milliers de participants."

for Vietnam" with plans for a "coordination center against the Vietnam War."<sup>59</sup> But while the protest had managed to bring in international participants and unify groups, reactions still demonstrated that divisions on the left indicated difficulties over how to fight the war and over control issues. The JCR called the 5,000 person meeting "a success as far as participation goes," arguing that "the presence of such a crowd, its enthusiasm, the content of numerous interventions in the colloquiums lets one see the degree of discontent" about the war. They also noted with pleasure the side-by-side presence of the representatives of numerous organizations at the tribune. They complained, however, that the "spectrum of organizations supporting this meeting does not allow for a great increase in understanding the political problems posed by the Vietnamese revolution and the help that the international workers' movement should bring it."<sup>60</sup> Their comments indicated that radicalizing views on the youth of the far left was driving a wedge between them and other protest movements. For the Communists, the issue remained one of discipline. *Le Monde* noted that while the PCF had sent members to attend, it had been "from the beginning hostile to this protest," and none of the twenty-one 'personalities' who had originated the call had ties to the Party. Although it participated, the Party expressed its discontent with the meeting shortly after it ended, when it expelled Jean Schalit, one of the principal organizers and a former editor of the UEC's newspaper, from the French Communist Party.<sup>61</sup> The action showed that despite the organizers' plan to "renew"

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<sup>59</sup> "Pour la constitution de 'comités de soutien au peuple vietnamien,' " *Le Monde* 14 May 1966.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> "Un des organisateurs de la manifestation 'Six heures pour le Vietnam' est exclu du parti communiste," *Le Monde* 2 June 1966.



protests and gather unity, splits within French left politics domestically still affected the French left's ability to protest internationally together.

### **"Defending the West Wherever It Fights:" Right-Wing Protests and the Rise of Occident**

In-fighting on the left butted up against actual physical fights between left and right. With the removal of Tixier-Vignancour from the presidential race, another far-right group stepped into the national spotlight: Occident. Young, violent, and rabidly nationalist, they set their sights on the French left and particularly on their anti-war protests. Throughout 1966, their meetings with the left increased in frequency and in levels of violence. While their insistence on violent acts made some see them, as one of their own put it, "an organization of violent thugs with no brains," Occident's rash actions stemmed from a rationalized conceptualization of French national identity, based in pride in France, sorrow for her lost empire, belief in white racial hegemony, and virulent anti-Communism. Small in number, Occident nevertheless contributed in a large way to the development of the Vietnam War protest dynamic in France in 1966 by challenging left-wing dominance in the universities, disputing left-wing and Gaullist presentations of French history, and creating an atmosphere of violence which pushed left-wing movements towards radicalization.

Occident emerged from a split in an earlier far-right student group, Europe-Action, in 1964.<sup>62</sup> Originally led by Pierre Sidos, they began establishing themselves on the scene over the course of 1965. Before Sidos fell out with Tixier-Vignancour, Occident comprised the majority of the intimidating "Comités T-V" which provided

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<sup>62</sup> Shields, *Extreme Right*, 139; Algazy, *L'extrême-droite en France de 1965 à 1984* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989), 45.

"security" at campaign events. They quickly became the main youth group on the far-right. Although small in number (total members stood at 300 to 400, but they could only "count on" about 40 regulars), Occident used the forces at its disposal extremely effectively.<sup>63</sup> Taking as their symbol the Celtic Cross, they set out to conquer the Latin Quarter. Aware of their smaller numbers, Occident from the beginning employed "commando" tactics, operating in small bands, frequently changing locales, and arranging for quick approaches and retreats from planned attacks.<sup>64</sup>

From its inception, Occident concentrated its attention on combatting anti-Vietnam War protests in France. In their view, support by the left -- and by de Gaulle -- for the North Vietnamese and for neutrality violated France's national obligations and France's historical role as a power of Western civilization, and demonstrated the real danger of communism in France. In an early article in their newspaper, *Occident Université*, the group declared their obligations to support the U.S. in Vietnam, stating "Wherever it fights, the West must be defended."<sup>65</sup> Support for the American war effort, they claimed, tied directly into France's "national interests." For France, defending the West meant standing up to de Gaulle's neutralist policy, because "the final victory of Communism, in which Monsieur de Gaulle believes, would mean the annihilation of France." Arguing that nationalism was the "essential sentimental motor" of the West, Occident asserted that "Defending the West involves fighting Communism by insisting on putting its partisans outside of the law. Defending the west means stating that France

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<sup>63</sup> Charpier, *Génération Occident: De l'extrême droite à la droite* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 112.

<sup>64</sup> Shields, 139.

<sup>65</sup> "Défendre l'occident partout où il se bat," *Occident Université* 8, 1965. Unfortunately, 1965 is the only year readily available for *Occident Université*.

can not be neutral in this conflict which threatens our civilization." Most significantly, they argued that by fighting against those who opposed the United States, they would keep France true to its past and push it in the direction it was meant to go: "Defending the West means wanting to make France a country worthy of its past, turned towards the future while faithful to its traditions incarnated in Joan of Arc, Saint-Louis, Napoleon, Charles du Foucauld, Liautey, and also Jean-Marie Bastien Thiry."<sup>66</sup> In standing up against anti-war protestors, Occident intended to shape France in the image it felt best represented its history and traditions: those of the white, Christian, nationalist, expansionist exponents of Western Civilization, and -- as the inclusion of Jean-Marie Bastien Thiry, attempted assassin of Charles de Gaulle, showed -- hostilely opposed to de Gaulle and his anti-colonial legacy.

Occident began converting these rhetorical attacks into physical assaults in late 1965. Continual fights between right-wing and left-wing students broke out in the Latin Quarter near the end of the year. On November 19th, *Le Monde* reported, left-wing students soliciting donations for the FNL and handing out leaflets in front of the university dining hall were set upon by right-wing students armed with sticks and pickaxes. One student needed to be hospitalized.<sup>67</sup> Shortly thereafter, *Rivarol* published a call to protest by Occident. Portraying themselves as the injured party, Occident called for like-minded individuals to join them in disrupting the CIU's planned International Protest Week -- or as they put it, "the communist protest in favor of the Vietcong" -- as a way of "countering the Marxist agitators, in order to defend the West wherever it

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. At the time of this article, Bastien-Thiry was imprisoned in France under penalty of death for his part in the assassination plot.

<sup>67</sup> "A Paris: Incidents au Quartier Latin," *Le Monde* 21-22 November 1966.

fight." <sup>68</sup> That time, Occident was not able to directly confront the left-wing protestors, but they were not discouraged. <sup>69</sup>

As 1966 progressed, Occident's actions became more organized, more violent, and more recognized by others on the far right as a defense of nationalist interests. On March 25, Occident called for a nationalist student protest to counter the planned Communist protest. "At the moment where countries in the 'third world' are ridding themselves of Communists, our duty is to do the same thing in France," Occident declared. "The generals Suharto and Nguyen Cao Ky have shown us the road to follow. We'll begin by transporting into France the methods that have guaranteed their success." During the protest, about a hundred militants clashed with the police and split up before regrouping and ripping the iron grills off the windows of a Communist Party office. <sup>70</sup> Over that week, "violent brawls" in the Latin Quarter led *Rivarol* to laud the union of nationalist student groups in the battle against Gaullism and communism. In these fights, Occident joined up with the nationalist groups Jeune Alliance (Young Alliance) and the Fédération des Etudiants Nationalistes (Nationalist Student Federation) in fighting leftist students. <sup>71</sup> Informing readers of Occident's program of "fighting against communist domination in the universities, for the victory of the West wherever it fights, and for the complete and immediate amnesty of all patriots imprisoned by the government," *Rivarol* applauded

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<sup>68</sup> No title, *Rivarol* 25 November 1965.

<sup>69</sup> "A Paris, plus de deux mille étudiants manifestent contre la guerre," *Le Monde* 28-29 November 1965.

<sup>70</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 25 March 1965.

<sup>71</sup> Both of these student groups would shortly fall by the wayside, leaving Occident as the main right-wing group.

Occident's "ardor and courage." The UNEF, *Rivarol* gloated, would "from now on be able to find someone to 'talk' to, if that's what they're looking for."<sup>72</sup>

In late May, Occident, "determined to smash communist action in the Latin Quarter," called for nationalist students to join them in "breaking" a planned JCR protest on the twentieth in support of the Vietcong.<sup>73</sup> The resulting clash gave the far-right writer Robert Anders of *Rivarol* "hope for the future."<sup>74</sup> Storming the Latin Quarter to chants of "Vietcong Assassin!" and "Nationalism!," the right-wingers at first found themselves blocked from the JCR by the police. Pushed back, Occident moved into the neighboring streets, smashing the windows of La Joie de Lire, a Maoist bookstore, throwing a smoke bomb into the cafe Le Campollion, a gathering spot for leftists, and causing several injuries.<sup>75</sup> Encountering some JCR militants venturing out of the Sorbonne, Occident began fighting with them. The far-right students' strength was so overwhelming, *Rivarol* claimed, that the JCR was forced to flee to the Right Bank to hold the rest of its protest. Occident, now "masters of the Latin Quarter," marched back towards the Sorbonne chanting slogans "favorable to President Johnson's politics." They clashed with the police again, causing some injuries and a few arrests, none of which were maintained. By 8PM, the Latin Quarter was calm, although some nationalist students remained to keep an eye

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<sup>72</sup> Henri Jomiet, "Violentes bagarres au Quartier Latin," *Rivarol* 31 March 1966.

<sup>73</sup> No title, *Rivarol* 19 May 1966.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Anders, "Nationaux contre communistes au Quartier Latin," *Rivarol* 26 May 1966.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid; "Manifestatins d'étudiants boulevard de Sébastopol et au quartier latin à propos de la guerre du Vietnam," *Le Monde* 22-23 May 1966.

out. "Wasted effort," *Rivarol* noted; "the lesson was a good one and the communists were not coming back." <sup>76</sup>

"It's comforting to see that the French youth has stayed, in its immense majority, hostile to the anti-American policies of the government," *Rivarol* reflected after the clashes. The protests, Anders asserted, had demonstrated that the nationalist students were a force to be reckoned with and "would not tolerate any Gaullist-communist provocation." The fights were "encouraging" because they showed that without bringing in the workers -- who, Anders claimed, were more interested in "defending their dinner steaks than their 'Vietcong brothers'" -- the leftist students were unable to stand up to Occident and could do nothing beyond "shouting out slogans and insults." Most of all, Anders remarked, the battles let him have "hope in the future, because they cement the union [...] between nationalist party militants at the base, who are too often divided at the summit."<sup>77</sup> As Occident rose to prominence, its violent methods drew more attraction and approval, and began unifying the right-wing student groups into one viciously armed force.

### **Trying to "Start from Zero:" Leftwing Unity and The Formation of the Comité Vietnam National**

While the far right closed ranks, the left entered the fall of 1966 more determined to act against the war but just as divided. Protests had continued throughout the summer months, but differences between the Communist Party and other activists and disagreements among the major leftwing political parties kept the left from presenting a unified front. In September of 1966, the left received another blow when de Gaulle spoke

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<sup>76</sup> Robert Anders, "Nationaux contre communistes au Quartier Latin," *Rivarol* 26 May 1966.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

out against the war at Phnom Penh, Cambodia. 1966 had already been a watershed year for de Gaulle as far as Indochina was concerned. In January, he had exchanged letters with Ho Chi Minh, and over the course of the spring he took the necessary steps to extract France from NATO's military command. But his most striking contribution came at Phnom Penh, where, in a speech in front of thousands that was immediately relayed around the world, he placed the blame for the war on American shoulders, acknowledged the validity of the NLF as partners in any mediation, and offered up his own success in Algeria as a model for how the U.S. could leave Vietnam. His condemnation of U.S. actions -- the most direct he had offered to date -- and his presentation of France's past in Algeria, as resolved by his actions as president, as a way of ending war in Vietnam, raised yet more obstacles to a left still struggling to come out of the shadow of his foreign policy.<sup>78</sup>

In their reactions to the speech, the left questioned de Gaulle's sincerity but also underlined how his comments forced them to act more decisively. Christian Pineau of *Le Populaire* decried de Gaulle as a spokesman for peace in Vietnam, noting that he had, at the end of World War II, been responsible for the start of the first Indochina War (which he then abandoned to the Fourth Republic), and arguing that he clearly did not support peace, as he had followed his Phnom Penh declarations with further nuclear tests.<sup>79</sup> Slightly more generous, *L'Humanité* admitted that "[they] appreciat[ed] this speech as an element that could help lead to a political solution," but hastened to note that "it in fact

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<sup>78</sup> For further interpretations of the Phnom Penh speech, see: Pierre Journoud, "La Visite du général de Gaulle à Phnomh Penh: Entre mythes et réalités," <http://ipr.univ-paris1.fr/bulletin/bulletin.shtml>; Jean Lacouture, "De Gaulle et la gestion des crises: le discours de Phnom Penh."

<sup>79</sup> Christian Pineau, "Les contradictions d'un tour du monde," *Le Populaire* 13-14 September 1966.

takes up positions that we've been holding since the start of the conflict, more than ten years ago." They also reminded their readers that even if he was right on Vietnam, de Gaulle was not to be trusted, warning "We do not forget at all that he who gave this speech does not obey the same motives that we do."<sup>80</sup> Laurent Schwartz admitted that de Gaulle had a "left-wing policy" internationally, recognized by the Third World. But he refused to let this hold back the left, arguing "We can surpass Gaullism. De Gaulle," he remarked, "does not have the domestic policy of his international policy."<sup>81</sup> In other words, despite their agreement with de Gaulle on international matters the left could still be a valid player on the homefront and make a significant impact worldwide.

Convinced that a left working together would be more effective, a handful of well-known intellectuals and academics launched a call in October 1966 to create one over-arching committee for all Vietnam protest groups. Their organization, the Comité Vietnam National (National Vietnam Committee, or CVN), would go on to become "the most active and the most prestigious" protest group.<sup>82</sup> Yet reactions to the Comité's creation demonstrated the depth of divisions on the left, showing how they extended beyond a simple Communist/others split and highlighting the desire for more radical actions against the war.

The idea for the Comité Vietnam National had its roots in the May 14th call for "support committees for Vietnam" with a planned "'coordination center against the Vietnam war,' grouping the totality of interested French organizations," which Laurent

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<sup>80</sup> Jean-Emile Vidal, "De Gaulle a Phnom Penh: La condition de la négociation c'est le départ des troupes US du Vietnam 'dans un délai convenable et déterminé.' A Washington, premières réactions (non officielles) défavorables," *L'Humanité* 2 September 1966.

<sup>81</sup> Laurent Schwartz, "Il faut crever l'écran," *Nouvel Observateur* 16-22 November 1966.

<sup>82</sup> Jean Lacouture, "L'opinion française et la seconde guerre du Vietnam," *Le Monde* 13 December 1966.



Schwartz had the charge of creating.<sup>83</sup> Although the committee did not put together anything large during the summer, in September 1966 they began working to create another meeting which they hoped would be "if possible, even more massive."<sup>84</sup> Dealings with the PCF for the first meeting had been "long and difficult," and preliminary discussions for the second meeting proved no different.<sup>85</sup> At a reunion to discuss the possibility of a new "Six Hours," Schwartz described running into "considerable reticence" from those in the Communist camp. "Lively" discussions dragged on until midnight, at which point a frustrated Schwartz broke in. "There's no point in looking for an agreement," he said, "we're not going to find it. So, [*eh bien*] we'll organize the protest ourselves." His faction broke off to work on their own. In his memoirs, Schwartz described it as "leaving for a new adventure. I had the feeling I was taking a sacred risk for Vietnam."<sup>86</sup>

In his venture, Schwartz was joined by four other intellectuals: Jean-Paul Sartre, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Alfred Kastler, and Henri Bartoli. The group brought a mix of tradition and cachet to the anti-war movement. All were known in France, with philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre as the unquestionable "star."<sup>87</sup> Schwartz and Vidal-Naquet had, along with Sartre, been heavily involved in protesting the Algerian War. Vidal-Naquet, a historian, had made a name for himself with his role in the Comité Audin, a group which protested French use of torture in Algeria. Kastler, a physicist, had recently

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<sup>83</sup> "Pour la constitution de 'comités de soutien au peuple vietnamien,'" *Le Monde* 14 May 1966.

<sup>84</sup> Schwartz, *Un Mathématicien aux prises avec le siècle* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997), 434.

<sup>85</sup> Madeleine Rebérioux, interview with Nicolas Pas, quoted in Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre," Chapter One.

<sup>86</sup> Schwartz, *Un Mathématicien*, 434-5.

<sup>87</sup> Pas, "Sortir de l'Ombre," Chapter One. .

won the Nobel Prize for his work. As an activist, he had joined Sartre and Schwartz in protesting against the Algerian War in 1958. Beginning in 1965, he had worked with the CIU, writing a piece in *Le Monde* supporting their November 1965 meeting which established historical parallels between the actions of contemporary American academics and of French academics during the Algerian war.<sup>88</sup> Bartoli, less well-known, had been a member of the French group "Association d'Amitié Franco-Vietnamienne" (French-Vietnamese Friendship Group) and was active on the Christian left.<sup>89</sup>

The first call for a Comité Vietnam National went out in October and focused upon France's intimate connection with Vietnam's fight: "Thousands of miles from Europe, a people whom nothing can bring down is fighting for their liberty. They are also fighting for ours." Claiming that the U.S. used Vietnam as a way of determining just how far it could go towards global domination, the organizers argued that the time had come for the French to make a stronger stand. "Meeting up to proclaim our admiration or our solidarity with the North Vietnamese and NLF fighters is no longer sufficient," they proclaimed. "All those who in this country support their fight must engage themselves without reserve so that the Vietnamese people can finally win peace and independence." To this end they were creating the Comité Vietnam National. They planned for the formation of multiple "base committees" who would report up to the "national committee" and asked existing groups to join up with them. Many, they claimed, had already agreed. They finished by emphasizing the importance of working together. "Today," they said, "dispersion hurts our efficiency and, faced with the seriousness of

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<sup>88</sup> Alfred Kastler, "Les Universitaires devant l'escalade," *Le Monde* 20 novembre 1965.

<sup>89</sup> Pas, "Sortir de l'Ombre," Chapter One.

events, we feel the need, in our fight by the side of the Vietnamese people, to call immediately for unity."<sup>90</sup> To this end, they invited all protestors to join them at a new "Six Hours" meeting, this one bearing a title that demonstrated its larger aims: "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam."

Laurent Schwartz offered more details of their vision of how the Comité Vietnam National would run in an interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in November. "We'd like, in some way, to start from zero," he explained. Since the existing anti-war groups were too "scattered," they believed that a national organization would "regroup all the energies." Not planning on direct control over the local committees, they hoped that these base committees would instead allow coordination by the national group, which would let those that wished "keep a certain autonomy." The group planned to support several extant movements, including the "Milliard pour le Vietnam," which aimed to collect a billion old francs to send to North Vietnam, and the Russell Tribunal, which aimed to put the U.S. on trial for war crimes in Vietnam.<sup>91</sup> But the committee planned to shake up the protest movement by "going farther." Their "Six Hours of the World" protest would move beyond Paris, with "Six Hours" meetings taking place in multiple cities simultaneously. Schwartz said the organized had considered other issues as well. "We could effectively boycott American products in France," Schwartz remarked, suggesting taking aim at companies such as Ford and Coca-Cola. "We have to think carefully about

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<sup>90</sup> Flyer, "Six Heures du Monde pour le Vietnam," Comité Vietnam National, 1966, BDIC 4 delta 1159; "Un 'Comité Vietnam National' appelle à l'unité des organisations qui manifestent contre la guerre," *Le Monde* 28 October 1966. This call was apparently preceded by a meeting with various groups on October 13th; a letter from Jean Schalit, who had been removed from the PCF following the original Six Hours protest, invited interested parties to come discuss the objectives and aims of the Comité Vietnam National and of base committees planning "far reaching actions" against the war. Lettre from "Comité d'action contre la guerre du Viet-Nam," Paris, no date, CHS Fonds Grobla Carton G.

<sup>91</sup> See Chapter Five for a detailed analysis of French participation in the Russell Tribunal.

this." In particular, Schwartz noted, the committee wanted to break intellectuals out of their ghetto and take their issues about Vietnam to the workers as well.. Deploing the current "screen" splitting the people from intellectuals, he argued the group should be able to go "do a 'teach-in' at the Renault factories."<sup>92</sup>

Most of all, however, Schwartz argued that the CVN wanted to "shake up public opinion" by reminding protestors of their historical power and by overcoming divisions within the left. He told *Le Nouvel Observateur* that "Lots of people are discouraged. They tell us 'You get involved for nothing and nothing comes out it...'" Schwartz particularly felt that intellectuals had given up after the Algerian war, feeling that their actions there had accomplished nothing. "This is false," Schwartz said. "[W]e made public opinion aware of the problems with the Algerian war." The awareness had created pressure on the government which caused de Gaulle to act and led to the end of the war. For Vietnam, Schwartz argued, intellectuals could have the same impact. However, he admitted that "the current formations of the left [...] are not very effective." He specifically singled out the difficulty of working with the Communists, saying "We asked for communist signatures. We're always ready to receive them. A unified movement can not happen without the communists. But for the moment, they don't want to *s'engager* in this direction." The CVN hoped, Schwartz said, that the Communists would change their minds and come to the Six Hours of the World protest.

Continued difficulties with the Communists did exist, demonstrating the ongoing struggle for control on the left. On October 28th, Jean-Pierre Kahane, a Communist and member of the original Six Hours committee, wrote a letter to *Le Monde* complaining

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<sup>92</sup> Laurent Schwartz, "Il faut crever l'écran," *Nouvel Observateur* 16-22 November 1966.

about the CVN's decision to call their inaugural meeting "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam." He claimed that the original organizers had recently met to figure out how to follow up the Six Hours protest, but at no point did anyone invoke the possibility of "Six Hours of the World."<sup>93</sup> He declared slyly that he hoped *Le Monde's* source was mistaken, for he believed the CVN founders would be "incapable" of "trying to annex the succes of May 26th for their own ends." Kahane noted nevertheless that "if [*Le Monde's*] information is confirmed, it will be sad to see that, by a *maladroite* initiative, the organizers of 'Six Hours of the World' are adding a ferment of division to the current dispersion of efforts." Schwartz responded in *Le Monde* with a brief but biting letter, accusing Kahane of not taking a strong enough stand for what he knew was right. The choice of the title "Six Hours of the World," Schwartz admitted, was an error on the part of the organizers who "hadn't thought long" about its problems. But the organizers, he pointed out, were not the only ones who should be admitting guilt. The first Six Hours had been marked by an "atmosphère that was frequently stifling, and certain people had inexcusable attitudes[.]" The current group's actions were intended to move on from that dysfunctional atmosphere "in the interest of communal action for Vietnam." This, Schwartz claimed, had been threatened by Kahane's anger at "an *erreur de forme*" on the part of the CVN; anger Schwartz found to be part of a "shocking dissymmetry" of action given his silence when faced with the "scandalous behavior of some of his fellow Party members." Schwartz said that he hoped with his letter, the conflict would go away and that activists "could come to a positive agreement for unitary action."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> This is clearly the September meeting Schwartz refers to in his memoirs as being contentious and which led to the CVN group deciding to splinter off.

<sup>94</sup> BDIC F delta 1081/17; reproduction of two letters in *Le Monde*

But the Communists were not the only ones unhappy with the large-scale aims of the CVN. Although the group claimed in their original call to have already drawn in numerous established local groups, comments by other groups showed an unwillingness to abandon ideological control to one group in the name of left-wing unity. The Milliard Campaign put out a press release stating they would be at the Six Hours of the World for Vietnam protest, but specifying that "this presence in no way implies [the Milliard's] adhesion to the Comité Vietnam National, which would exceed the limits of its mandate[.]"<sup>95</sup> Announcing the creation of their Vietnam Committee, the students at the Institute for Labor Studies emphasized that they intended to maintain their independence. A flyer for their group announced that:

THE COMMITTEE commits:

1) to creating and supporting all initiatives which fall into its defined perspectives [on how to support Vietnam]

2) to undertake a full examination of study and propaganda on the conditions, the significance and the actual consequences of this war.

THE COMMITTEE, currently AUTONOMOUS, reserves for itself the possibility of participating in campaigns and organizations which appear to it to be working in the same sense [as the committee].

At the moment, the flyer noted, the committee members "are in agreement about participating very efficiently for the success of the 'Six Hours of the World for Vietnam' protest," created by the CVN. They then quickly added, however, "Not to say that we're joining up organically, at this point, with this committee [the CVN], but rather that we are in agreement with the type of support that the promoters of this protest want to offer to the Vietnamese fighters." Willingness to participate in the meeting, as these groups showed, did not mean willingness to conform to the CVN's wishes.

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<sup>95</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 29 November 1966.

Along similar lines, the UNEF spoke out against the CVN's plans. In a letter to Laurent Schwartz, Jean Terrell, the UNEF's president, expressed the student group's discontent with how the creation of the CVN had been handled. Specifically, he wrote, the UNEF opposed "the very unfortunate title that lends itself to confusion with the protest of last May 26th" and the "precipitous and not very courteous character of the five personalities' call towards the UNEF, which was an active partner for each of the 21 [organizers of the original Six Hours]." More than this general discourtesy, Terrell noted, the UNEF had concerns about the level of control the national committee would offer, or the necessity of even having any control from a national committee. "[The UNEF] supports developing, among students, base committees [...] which will organize information and agitation against the war," Terrell wrote, "at the same time as they work to cause an anti-imperialist awakening of conscience among the students. [The UNEF] does not believe, however, that a national coordination of base committees actually existing is desirable." National coordination, they noted, would only exist if the national group could prove itself to be truly unitary and if the base committees were truly active. "We think," Terrell told Schwartz, "that if the base committees should one day come under a national coordinating structure, this must come truly from the committees and not be 'astutely' imposed upon them."<sup>96</sup>

Yet despite these reservations, the UNEF noted that "the November 28th protest and the eventual constitution of a Comité Vietnam National are -- of course -- two distinct things." The UNEF agreed to support "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam," stating that "it is vital that students' and workers' opposition to American imperialism and

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<sup>96</sup> Jean Terrell to Laurent Schwartz, Paris, 22 November 1966, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.

the Johnson administration be shown this *rentrée*. And we are, in this way, favorable to all protests which aim to increase this opposition." To that end, the UNEF had called upon its militants to support the protest and were distributing at the universities 50,000 copies of a tract about the protest's aims.<sup>97</sup> But even their publicity about the event retained a cautionary note: in a press release about the UNEF's Vietnam-based activities which included a statement of their support for the Six Hours of the World Protest, the group declared that "the UNEF calls to create base committees of support for the Vietnamese people in study groups and *facultés* [...] The UNEF believes that this task takes priority and comes before any national coordination of these committees[.]"<sup>98</sup> Like the other groups, the UNEF's declarations showed a willingness to work together but a continued current of independence among groups which interfered with complete unity on the left.

Despite resistance from the Communists, and unwillingness of other groups to submit to the CVN, the "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam" protests drew large numbers of participants. The meeting in Rouen highlighted the movements' ability to draw in multiple groups and big names, even outside of Paris, and to overcome the PCF's opposition. Militant Gérard Filoche recalled that the Rouen organizers managed to get Le Dinh Nan, a North Vietnamese official, to come to the protest. "The PCF was furious," he remembered, "but all the democratic organizations opposed to the war in Rouen brought their support to our initiative." To hold the protest, the group rented out the Cirque de Rouen, a large building with a capacity of 3000. They offered up "films by Roger Pic and Wilfred Burchett, images and books by Madeleine Riffaud," as well as talks by Jean-

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> "Communiqué de Presse," UNEF, 28 November 1966, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.



Pierre Vigier, recently back from Vietnam, Mary Alice Waters, head of the American Socialist Workers' Party, and an American deserter who received a standing ovation. The Vietnamese also showed up, despite being warned by the PCF that "they were coming to support 'a band of *gauchistes*.'" Filoche reminisced over the success, stating "This was a triumph: we, a small group of adolescent activists [...] we had managed to do what none of the old parties on the left had wanted or been able to do: a paying meeting of a 1,500 enthusiastic participants working for peace by an NLF victory."<sup>99</sup> It was clear the left could come together for a good meeting even without the support of the PCF.

The central protest, "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam" on November 28th in Paris, showed the new levels the CVN organizers were hoping to reach. The meeting incorporated many of the cultural and political elements that had characterized the uniqueness of the original "Six Hours" presentation, but on a grander scale. Five thousand people crowded into the Mutualité for a night that offered speeches, teach-in style colloquiums, and performances, as the first "Six Hours" had, but with more options (five colloquiums instead of four), a more global focus (appearances by several "eminent foreign personalities" from Brazil, Morocco, Cuba, the United States and the Netherlands), and more star power (opening speeches by Schwartz and Kastler and a central speech by Sartre). Participants had the possibility of learning about "Methods of Fighting Against Aggression," "Gaullism and the Vietnam War," "The United States Faced with the War," "Vietnam's Social and National Liberation," and "The Anti-Imperialist Fight in the World." As part of the cultural section organized by playwright Armand Gatti and actor/writer Claude Roy, they could then watch the world premiere of

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<sup>99</sup> Filoche, Gérard. 68-98. 35-36.

Wilfred Burchett, an Australian filmmaker's, new documentary "L'Enlèvement, l'impasse" as well as hearing readings from actress Loleh Bellon. In addition to performances by Pierre Asso, Jacques Martin, and Pia Colombo, those attending got to hear the French premiere of Italian singer Luigi Nono's song dedicated to the FNL, "The forest is so young and full of life." The announcement in *Le Monde* specified that the event's poster had been painted by Max Ernst, the German painter and well-known surrealist.<sup>100</sup>

Through the additional celebrity and spectacle, the meeting outpaced any previous French offering. The *Tribune Socialiste* cheered that the protest showed that "it was thus possible to bring action in France against the Vietnam War, and to affirm our solidarity with the Vietnamese people, at a much higher level."<sup>101</sup>

During the night, speakers underlined the need for French involvement and the need for new protest methods. Opening the meeting, Laurent Schwartz said that the protest was meant to show "the solidarity of French public opinion with the North Vietnamese people, as they fight against American imperialism."<sup>102</sup> Sartre, whose comments Simone de Beauvoir said "caused unbridled enthusiasm" to break out, stood in front of the auditors and declared "We want peace in Vietnam, but not just any peace."<sup>103</sup> Taking a stand against the tone of recent protests, Sartre continued, "But we do not want this peace for simple moral reasons. Morality is not a sufficient motive. Our motive, the motive of our combat, must be political." Sartre placed support for the North Vietnamese

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<sup>100</sup> "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 30 November 1966; "A la Mutualité: de nombreuses personnalités étrangères participeront à la manifestation 'Six Heures pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 27-28 November 1966; "Aujourd'hui à la Mutualité: Manifestation internationale contre la guerre au Vietnam," *Le Figaro* 28 November 1966.

<sup>101</sup> "Les six heures du Monde pour le Vietnam," *Tribune Socialiste* 3 December 1966.

<sup>102</sup> "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam.'"

<sup>103</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout Compte Fait*, 464-5.

as part of a larger fight against "American hegemony, against American imperialism." Tying the French future tightly to the outcome of the Vietnam War, he concluded, "The defeat of the Vietnamese people would be politically our defeat, the defeat of all free people. Because Vietnam is fighting for us."<sup>104</sup>

### **"The Likes of Which Have Not Been Seen for Years:" Increasing Protests and Radicalization at the End of 1966**

Reflecting on the "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam" meeting, the CVN exulted in 1967 that "the success of this meeting immediately let the CVN gain a solid base." Starting in December and continuing on, the CVN noted, militants had formed base committees throughout Paris and its suburbs. Multiple protests showed the force of these groups, including one on December 16th featuring the CVN, the UNEF, the PCF, the Mouvement de la Paix and the CIU, which also highlighted its ability to create unity.<sup>105</sup> Others also applauded the growing protest movement. In an article in the *Tribune Socialiste* entitled "The Escalation of Refusal," the writers described an early December protest and cheered the strength of feeling against the war in France. "The success of this protest, put together in a very short time period, after the success of the two 'Six Hours for the Vietnam' evenings organized by the Comité Vietnam National," the *Tribune* wrote, conflating the early non-CVN protest with the more recent gathering, "shows very well how much French workers and intellectuals are determined to assert their solidarity with the just struggle for national liberation led by the Vietnamese people

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<sup>104</sup> "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam.'"

<sup>105</sup> "Depuis le 28 novembre déjà," *Pour le Vietnam* April 1967. *Pour le Vietnam* was the official newspaper of the CVN.

and the NLF fighters."<sup>106</sup> Looking back on 1966 for the Christian left newspaper *Esprit*, Jean-Marie Domenach spoke of a year full of "meetings so virulent, so exuberant, the likes of which have not been seen for years."<sup>107</sup> In the number of protests and the attempts at left-wing unity, 1966 marked a new beginning of political activism for the left in France, raising them from the stupor into which they had fallen since the end of the Algerian War.

But as noted, the renewed activity did not come without strife. Even the "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam" meeting, which had drawn in groups even if they were unwilling to acquiesce to all of the CVN's demands, found controversy. *Le Monde's* summary of the protest noted continuing divisions among the left, with splits primarily along the Soviet/Chinese lines. More damningly, it dismissed a left "expressing itself in terms which too often reflect less a real knowledge of the facts, than poorly rationalized preferences."<sup>108</sup> Conflict had also emerged during the meeting, where Alfred Kastler's contribution was roundly booed and led to perceptions of a "duel" between him and Sartre. Where Sartre had argued for an NLF victory and more committed protests at home to support the Vietnamese who were "fighting for us," Kastler had spoke out for a peace based on compromise. Attempting to explain himself later to *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Kastler remarked "If the Vietnamiens' war is really our war, then it's up to us to participate in it as well: we can't, we don't have the right, to say to the Vietnamese 'Fight until the end to defend *our* cause.'" He explained "I'm just worried that we'll end up asking too much from the Vietnamese people and that if we get comfortable with the idea

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<sup>106</sup> "L'escalade du refus," *Tribune Socialiste* 2 December 1966.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Laurent Jalabert, "Aux origines de la génération 1968," 73.

<sup>108</sup> "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam.' "

that they're fighting for us, we'll finish by letting them fight along against American imperialism[.]"<sup>109</sup> There were, he felt, other fights the French could join in, and fighting for his idea of a compromise peace could be one of them. While Kastler insisted that despite this divergence, he and Sartre remained in agreement on the "essentials" of the war, their fight and *Le Monde's* observations demonstrated that splits in opinion hindered joint action for the left.

Perhaps more to the point was a comment Pierre Vidal-Naquet made during the "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam" rendez-vous, when he reminded participants that "A meeting is not a revolution, and the Mutualité is not France."<sup>110</sup> An IFOP poll from 1966 showed that while 41% of the French disapproved American actions in Vietnam, 49% had no opinion, an attitude which commentator Jean Lacouture described as "expressing more scepticism, it seems, than indignation."<sup>111</sup> While a good number of the French opposed the war, helped on, as Lacouture noted, by de Gaulle's condemnation and a general "nurtured" anti-Americanism, the "'large batallions' of the campaign against the war are still found on the left and far-left." And these groups, Lacouture reminded his readers, were continually split by in-fighting. The protest groups were marked by "the conjunction of the most official conformism and the most vehement anti-conformism," Lacouture remarked. But even these differences were balanced out by a uniting goal: "a common refusal to accept the law of the strongest."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Alfred Kastler, "Jusqu'au dernier Vietnam," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 7-13 December 1966.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Jean Lacouture, "L'opinion française et la seconde guerre du Vietnam."

<sup>111</sup> Jean Lacouture, "L'opinion française et la seconde guerre du Vietnam."

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

If not involving the majority of the French, the protest movement in 1966 had nevertheless spread rapidly, increasing in size and notoriety while moving from traditional protests to more radical, and often more violent, actions. During the December 16th protest referenced by the CVN, protestors clashed violently with the police, causing multiple injuries among both police and protestors and leading to numerous arrests.<sup>113</sup> During the fights, protestors chanted "Charonne, Charonne!," invoking the police-protestor clash during the Algerian war which had resulted in the death of 9 protestors. For the left, the increased police repression indicated the repressive nature of the French state and challenged the apparent progressivism of de Gaulle's views on Vietnam. Describing a police beating during a different early December protest, the *Tribune Socialiste* told of a young protestor walking by with long hair, a typical sign of a left-wing youth, similar to hippie styles in the States. "You're going to get the hell out of here, *gonzesse*," a police officer cried out, using an insult that mixed the word for Vietnamese monks (*bonze*) and the left (*gauche*) but included a feminine ending. As the *Tribune Socialiste* recounted, the protestor stopped and asked "Does it bother you that I'm yelling 'Peace in Vietnam?'," at which point multiple officers began beating him. An "elegant and polite" older woman watching from a nearby café as the police loaded protestors up into paddy wagons asked "But why is De Gaulle letting them do this is?" A nearby protestor responded, "No. Why is he making them do this?" The change from trying to work against agreement with de Gaulle, to directly challenging de Gaulle as repressive, would

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<sup>113</sup> "Au cours de la manifestation pour la paix, trois cent seize personnes ont été appréhendées dans le quartier de l'Opéra," *Le Monde* 18-19 December 1966.

find more echo in the protests emerging in 1967 and was defined by the protestor's cries that day as they yelled "US Assassins! De Gaulle complicit!"<sup>114</sup>

The emerging aggression of left-wing protests was amplified by ever-growing attacks by the far-right, which contributed to creating a general atmosphere of violence. Testifying to the importance of the CVN, Occident attacked their headquarters twice over a week. According to one of the CVN witnesses, seven militants had been sitting in their office "when a dozen students burst into the interior, armed with billyclubs and *chambres à air* filled with sand. They fell upon us," he recalled, "overturning all the furniture as they came. Before leaving, they broke all the windows." Four of the CVN members attacked suffered serious bruising.<sup>115</sup> Occident also disturbed a Vietnam War peace meeting held by left-wing Christians, at which, *Rivarol* pointed out, the left's "*services d'ordre*" gave as good as they got.<sup>116</sup> In Toulouse, the Fédération des étudiants nationalistes attacked students protesting the war, "beating them with boards ripped off a construction site, billy clubs, and belt buckles." One student had to be hospitalized. They followed this with an attack on the Association générale des étudiants at Toulouse, where several UNEF members were injured.<sup>117</sup> Shortly thereafter, student groups demanded that Occident be dissolved, arguing that "it would be inadmissible to confuse such aggression with the legitimate exercise of political and syndical student activity in the universities,

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<sup>114</sup> "De Gaulle complice," *Tribune Socialiste* 2 December 1966.

<sup>115</sup> "Agression contre le siège parisien du Comité national vietnamien," *Le Monde* 3 December 1966.

<sup>116</sup> Edith Delamare, "Une soirée pour la paix, à la Mutualité," *Rivarol* 8 December 1966.

<sup>117</sup> "Des étudiants nationalistes déclenchent de violentes bagarres à Toulouse," *Le Monde* 11-12 December 1966.

and with the right of propaganda, which is also tied to a democratic society."<sup>118</sup> Lodging a complaint after his son was so badly beaten in a Latin Quarter confrontation that he needed his skull trepanned, novelist David Rousset said he had decided to pursue legal avenues "not for personal vengeance, but to alert public opinion. The seriousness of this incident comes from the fact that it is not unique," he noted. "In Paris and in the provinces, a movement of violence is developing."<sup>119</sup> The violence played into the growing desire of groups on both sides to push beyond traditional protest methods, to challenge each other for hegemony and the right to speak. Frédéric Charpier's description of the end of the year summed up nicely the situation: "Pipe wrenches, iron bars, fists American style: the escalation was there. The year 1966 ended in a crescendo of violence."<sup>120</sup> While he was referring to Occident, the general radicalization held throughout the youth. As *L'Express* noted, "More and more, kicks and punches are taking the place of dialogue. The brutality has no faith nor political horizon."<sup>121</sup>

### Conclusion

The emerging violence, the growing strength and presence of Occident, and the establishment of large groups which challenged the Communist Party's hegemony meant that 1966 changed the face of Vietnam War protests in France. Action for and against the war had moved from party politics in 1965 to street actions in 1966. Many of these actions continued some of the debates that had been raised during the '65 presidential season, notably over how to represent French history, particularly the legacy of the

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<sup>118</sup> "Trois syndicats demandent la dissolution du mouvement Occident," *Le Monde* 13 December 1966.

<sup>119</sup> "Les étudiants s'entraînent à la violence," *L'Express* 12-18 December 1966.

<sup>120</sup> Charpier, *Génération Occident*, 130.

<sup>121</sup> "Les étudiants s'entraînent à la violence," *L'Express* 12-18 December 1966.



Algerian war, and over how France should take a stand in the world. But the growing radicalization allowed protestors to take a firmer stand against de Gaulle, challenging his policies more vocally and, by changing the forum to one outside of the foreign policy arena he controlled, bringing the issues to the domestic front. The continued dissonance within the left-wing both hindered and helped the protest movements. In particular, the creation of new groups created a power force for the left outside of the Communist Party, raising a challenge of the Party being passed on its left which would continue to plague the PCF until the far left exploded in 1968. Finally, the increase in violent clashes between protestors and police, and between left and right, laid the foundation for an increasing radicalization of militants over the next year. These experiences would be, as Laurent Jalabert has shown, "at the origin of the '68 generation." The Communist Party was pleased in July with what it had seen, and Domenach in January 1967 saw 1966 as the most exuberant protests he'd seen in years. But these protests were nothing compared with what was to follow. Overall, 1966 set in place the groups and atmosphere which would push Vietnam War protests in France forward on a higher level, questioning as they did the policies of de Gaulle, of the left, of the far right, and of the identity of France itself.

### Chapter Three:

#### **"Today We Must Clearly Take a Stand:" The Growing Radicalization of the Vietnam War Movement in France, 1967**

On January 12, 1967, a deep fog lay over the university campus at Rouen. As the lunch hour started, a group of Parisian right-wing students belonging to the militant organization Occident emerged from their cars and headed towards the dining hall. Their target: a group of about sixty left-wing students who, according to the far-right paper *Rivarol* put it, were "dressed in dark leather jackets, wearing hammer-and-sickle style fur caps, [and] holding a meeting at Rouen in honor of the Vietcong."<sup>1</sup> The students, Rouennais members of the Comité Vietnam National, had gathered on either side of the line into the dining hall to ask students for money and support for a CVN activities.<sup>2</sup> As they pressed for more donations, the Occident group suddenly burst forth from the fog, shouting "*Occident vaincra, Occident passera, de Gaulle au poteau!*" ["Occident will win, Occident will pass, lynch de Gaulle!"]<sup>3</sup> The left-wing students never had a chance. In the blink of an eye, Occident was upon them, beating them with iron bars, billy clubs, and other improvised weapons. Before the students in the dining hall had even had the chance to pour out into the courtyard in response to the cries of "Fight!" that had broken out, Occident finished their work, smashing the front windows of the dining hall before

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<sup>1</sup> Argus, "Echec aux étudiants marxistes-léninistes-maoïstes," *Rivarol* 19 January 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Gérard Filoche, 68-98, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Charpier, *Génération Occident*, 132. The "Occident will pass" is a play on the anti-fascist call "They shall not pass!" (*No pasaran!*) from the Spanish Civil War.

disappearing into the fog again. In the chaos left behind them, amidst pools of blood and broken glass, several students lay seriously injured, one in a coma with a fractured skull.<sup>4</sup> "Communism aggression has suffered a new setback," cheered *Rivarol*. "Next, the Latin Quarter, Nanterre, Montpellier, and the University of Rouen plan on liberating themselves from their 'bolcho' students."<sup>5</sup>

The attack made national news, and police quickly launched an investigation to find the perpetrators. As the authorities searched, far-right students struck again repeatedly: breaking up a meeting in Bordeaux, attacking a group seeking donations for the Vietnamese in Lyon, and at one point, jumping two men hanging theater advertisements in Paris whom they mistook for left-wing militants posting pro-Vietcong propaganda.<sup>6</sup> In March, five students came under arrest for the Rouen attacks. Newspaper coverage showed them unrepentant: in a photo in *Paris-Normandie*, Occident member (and future French government Minister) Alain Madelin held up his cuffed hands and smiled as police led him away.<sup>7</sup> Despite earning fines and jail time for several of its members, Occident did not stop counter-protesting and attacking anti-war movements in France. And despite *Rivarol*'s boasts, Occident's acts only spurred more leftist protest activity. CVN militant Gérard Filoche recalled that the Rouen Comité Vietnam received a bump in membership after the attacks and even formed a temporary "anti-fascist and pro-

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<sup>4</sup> Charpier, 132; Filoche, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Argus, "Echec aux étudiants marxistes-léninistes-maoïstes," *Rivarol* 19 January 1967.

<sup>6</sup> "Violente bagarre d'étudiants à Bordeaux," *Le Monde* 22-23 January 1967; "Bagarres entre étudiants à Lyon," *Le Monde* 27 January 1967; "Pris pour des militants d'un parti, deux colleurs d'affiches de théâtre sont attaqués," *Le Monde* 15 February 1967.

<sup>7</sup> *Paris-Normandie* 18 March 1967.

democracy" front with the French Communist Party.<sup>8</sup> Throughout 1967, their group, and others like it, would grow.

In 1967, the Vietnam War permeated France. Richard Perrin, an American deserter then resident in Paris, recalled seeing "a mannequin dressed in a U.S. pilot's uniform" and "sandals made from the tires of downed American warplanes and rings fashioned from similar wreckage" for sale at the Vietnamese section of the Villejuif fair.<sup>9</sup> On the news every evening, the war often spilled over into the streets, with numerous major protests occurring throughout the year. The protest movements also continued to expand. As the Comité Vietnam National became more firmly entrenched, it found itself challenged not only by a recalcitrant French Communist Party but also by the newly emerged Maoists Comités Vietnam de base (Local Vietnam Committees, or CVBs). Occident strengthened its ranks, stepped up its violent tactics, and found support from more established members of the far right by providing "security" for the former French paratrooper, Algerian War veteran, and far-right politician Roger Holeindre and his newly formed group, the Front Uni pour Vietnam de Sud (United Front for South Vietnam). While those involved in active protest represented, as activist René Dumont noted in early January, only a small proportion of the total French population, they were nevertheless strongly committed to their cause and convinced that their actions in France had ramifications for the outcome of the war abroad and, by extension, for France itself. In his own call for participation, Dumont wrote "History is not made by the passive, and our action can quickly become truly effective. If we don't manage to stop the formidable

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<sup>8</sup> Filoche, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Perrin, with Tim McCarthy. *G.I. Resister: The Story of How One American Soldier and his Family Fought the War in Vietnam* (Victoria: Trafford, 2001), 71.

'escalation' we risk soon suffering from it directly and personally."<sup>10</sup> For far-right activists, the fight held similar significance; as Francine Dessaigne wrote in *Rivarol* early February, "Vietnam is most likely the last stand in the free world."<sup>11</sup>

As the central focus of French protestors in 1967, the Vietnam War offered a prime means of articulating their conceptions of the world and their desires for France. While some interactions between groups rehashed debates established the previous year, 1967 holds significance because the emergence of new players and new dialogues forced a reconceptualization of French protest methods, created deeper rifts between activists, and led to more radicalized understandings of French roles on both the right and the left. Nicolas Pas has shown in his dissertation, "Sortir de l'Ombre du Parti Communiste," that anti-war protest groups at this time served as a means for left-wing groups to free themselves from the tutelage of the French Communist Party. Yet as this chapter will show, divisions extended beyond the Communist/non-communist dichotomy. Through an examination of five key protests, this chapter will trace the developments in French Vietnam-War based activity throughout the year to demonstrate how French protests brought to light not only questions of how to be on the left, but also questions of France's role. Increasingly, as the year advanced, Vietnam War protests focused more and more on what protestors wanted for France.

### **Problems for "Ho Chi Minh's Allies:" The Left and Occident at the 21 February Protests**

With the first major protest of the year, on February 21st, activists' attempts to change up French protest methods, as well as the problems caused by continued in-

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<sup>10</sup> René Dumont, "Pour le Vietnam," *Le Monde* 7 January 1967.

<sup>11</sup> Francine Dessaigne, , "Deux Nobel face à face: le 'féal' et le 'traître,'" *Rivarol* 2 February 1967.

fighting, became clearly visible. Originated by the newly formed Maoist Comités Vietnam de base, the February 21st protest called for an "anti-imperialist day of action" in celebration of the Vietnamese people, "today at the front lines of the battles of workers and the people of the world."<sup>12</sup> Through their chosen date, the CVBs hoped to revive an anti-colonialist protest tradition that had been popular during the Algerian War. They linked their support to the war tightly to the Vietnamese by making their program the "Four and Five Points" of the NLF and the North Vietnamese, specifically insisting upon the NLF's role as "the only authentic representative of the people." Among their French counterparts, the CVBs encouraged protest "from the base," encouraging everyday people and workers to act out in a variety of forms. "Peace can't be begged for, peace is won by the resolute fight of the masses against their oppressors," the CVBs announced. Calling upon "French workers, immigrant workers, students, high school students" to work together to make the day a success, they encouraged people to focus on activity in everyday areas to spread the word. "Let's mobilize in workshops, in offices, in lecture halls, in high schools, in apprentice shops, so that the most diverse preparation styles and actions can make February 21st the culmination of an intensive militant work," they wrote. "Reinforce the base committees that exist, form new committees, multiply initiatives."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Victoire pour le Vietnam," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* June 1967. *Victoire pour le Vietnam* was the CVB's newspaper.

<sup>13</sup> The signers were listed as: "Jean Baby, professeur; Jean Betbeder, aléteur (CLAJ, Clubs de loisir et d'action de la jeunesse); Charles Bettelheim, professeur à l'école pratique des Hautes Etudes; Pierre Jalee, économiste; K S Karol, journaliste; Albert-Paul Lentin, journaliste; George Mattel, publiciste; Michel Mendes-France, professeur à la Faculté des sciences; Jean-Pierre Olivier, rédaction de "Garde Rouge" mensuelle de l'union des jeunes communistes (marxistes-léninistes); Jean-Louis Peninou, président de la commission internationale de l'UNEF; Bernard Schreiner, journaliste (ancien président de l'UNEF); Jean Terrel, étudiant (ancien président de l'UNEF); Eugène Tribout, dessinateur-projeteur (CGT Renault); Mathias Valensi, radio dépanneur (CLAJ); Jacques Valier, professeur à la faculté de droit." "Vietnam

The Comités Vietnam de base, also colloquially referred to as the "pro-Chinese," originated in a group of Maoist students at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, under the tutelage of Louis Althusser. Like the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire, they too had been members of the Union of Communist Students, but had been purged along with other rebels in 1965. Part of the Vietnam Committees from the start of the 1966 school year, they had originally worked with other groups with different political views, but gradually began to separate themselves off as 1966 ended and 1967 began.<sup>14</sup> The protest on February 21st marked their first large-scale action.

The CVB envisioned February 21st as the culmination of a month of action dedicated to the Vietnamese, a month which would allow them to reach greater numbers of people and hone their protest skills. Although not part of an umbrella organization like the CVN, the CVBs were networked and shared information to keep up with each other's works. They discussed their preparations for February 21st in a simply produced brochure entitled "February 21st Bulletin." As they noted, the bulletin's aim was not to "create a forum for agitation," but rather to make sure everyone knew what was going on. "Letting all known and unknown comrades working for February 21st know what initiatives have been taken, what new forms of action have been put in place: so that this exchange experience may help each one to lead the struggle at their workplace, in their neighborhood, in their lecture hall, that is our only goal," the editors wrote.<sup>15</sup> The various

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1954- 1966: journal du comité de soutien à la lutte du peuple Vietnamien de la Faculté des Sciences de Paris," no date, BDIC F delta 701/2.

<sup>14</sup> Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre," Chapter Two.

<sup>15</sup> "Bulletin du 21 février," BDIC F delta 751/1.

initiatives showcased the CVBs' Maoist interests, notably in their continual striving to involve workers and in their focus on a grassroots, low-key campaign.

At factories around France, the CVBs worked in small groups to directly spread "the struggle of the Vietnamese people" to the French. One committee put together a special edition of their newspaper, "Youth Special," which they "sold door to door in the housing projects, in the markets, at the doors of factories, in university dining halls, in high schools, in workshops, [and] in offices." The newspaper, which "Bulletin" editors felt "showed the solidarity of young French workers with their Vietnamese comrades," was also distributed by CVBs at factories such as Vitry and Nord Aviation, where, the editors noted, "missiles sold to the Americans are built." In addition to these efforts, CVB activists had managed to put together groups at Bezons and Montreuil as well as a Comité Vietnam at the large factory of Renault, which had managed to raise 3000 francs. Creating groups in these factories meant that the activists were working directly with the proletariat, the source of all potential revolution.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the working class, the CVBs attempted to reach future intellectuals via students, striving particularly hard to spread what they saw as the correct, Vietnamese version of events. The "Bulletin" told of one group, the Comité Vietnam of the Marais district in Paris, which consisted of both workers and students, who went out of their way to attract attention to the Vietnamese message. Starting at Christmas, they began decorating large signs with the *Courrier du Vietnam*, a journal created in North Vietnam consisting of news dispatches from the North Vietnamese view about the war. (They contrasted this paper with newspapers with dispatches written by the French or others

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



which interpreted, rather than presented, the Vietnamese view.) They stuck these signs, which stood out because of their red borders, all over the Marais. They then began a "militant sale" of the *Courrier du Vietnam* and other Vietnamese propaganda, succeeding in selling up to a dozen copies of the paper -- which, they noted, had been "totally unknown up until that point." The combined attack of guerilla advertising and person to person sale spread, so that "each week new information panels are created and stuck up while the militant sale in the marketplace has become the rally point of the friends of the Vietnamese people." In Parisian high schools, notably Louis-le-Grand and Lakanal, students formed committees despite administrative resistance and took repeated opportunities to speak up about the war as well as distributing literature around school exits as their peers came and went.

Right-wing students sometimes attacked the CVB activists as they worked, but the committee members strived to turn right-wing harassment into a positive. Repeated harassment of students distributing literature at Lakanal led to an "improvised protest of 200 people," which drew attention to the cause.<sup>17</sup> When the information panels activists had created "at the cost of long nights" were "ripped or covered up," the members of the Contrescarpe committee took the setback as a chance to "put themselves in the school of the Vietnamese people." By this, they meant learning the discipline and continued desire to fight which they believed motivated the Vietnamese, despite apparent superior force on the opposing side. To this end, the Contrescarpe group "did not hesitate, despite the presence of fascist organizations in their quarter, to put up panels each week, most of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

which were rapidly destroyed."<sup>18</sup> Although comparing pasting up propaganda to fighting in an actual war might have seemed a bit of a stretch, the CVBs felt that their actions showed they were learning the revolutionary lessons the Vietnamese had to offer.

Most of all, the CVB activists strove to keep their activities at the grassroots, and base them on what they saw as Vietnamese desires, refusing the calls for peace by the PCF and spurning the celebrity endorsements that appeared to drive the CVN. They expected all militants at the protest on the 21st to yell out "FNL will win," which marked a strong distance from the PCF's preferred call of "Peace in Vietnam."<sup>19</sup> The "Bulletin" described a meeting at the Sorbonne on February 9th, which drew between 500 and 800 students. Large "information panels" drew visitors to stands selling Vietnamese propaganda. Students had hung the North Vietnamese and the NLF flags in the courtyard, and they had "militants stationed at the exits selling the *Courrier du Vietnam*." But despite the carnival atmosphere, the "Bulletin" stressed that they had "systematically refus[ed] to make the protest into a spectacle" and that to that end "speeches were made not by celebrities but by militants: a comrade of the Vietnam Committees, Roger Pic from the Russell Tribunal investigation groups, and comrades from the Vietnamese Student Unions."<sup>20</sup> To the CVBs, the key purpose was spreading the Vietnamese message, as told by the Vietnamese, person to person. The move clearly indicated a belief that the French should hold a background, supporting role in the anticipated revolution.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "21 février: une manifestation offensive," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* June 1967.

<sup>20</sup> "Bulletin du 21 février." Pic was a well-known filmmaker, so claiming him as "not a celebrity" was iffy, but he certainly lacked the cachet of a Sartre or a Picasso.

Yet despite their distaste for CVN methods, the CVBs agreed when delegates from the Comité Vietnam National suggested working together to prepare the February 21st protest. To insure the protest went as they desired, the CVBs insisted that the joint work be run by an "organization committee" whose members would be chosen directly from the grassroots committees. This condition was necessary, they explained, because "it authorized a mass style, [and] because it privileged grassroots work for Committees and teams [working in] lecture halls, neighborhoods, and enterprises." The CVN, however, moved on with its own planning, and after complaining, the two groups came to a compromise: the "Preparation Organization Committee for February 21st" would be made up of CVB members, UNEF leaders, and "a few celebrities." The inclusion of celebrities went against the grain, especially as it detracted from the grassroots work the CVBs considered essential. Yet they decided in the end that the CVN's actions, including their plan for a meeting on February 20th at the Mutualité, constituted "an important contribution, in which we rejoice, for the success of the anti-imperialist day of February 21st."<sup>21</sup>

The actual protest produced mixed results. While it received little notice in the press -- *Le Monde* devoted only a small blurb to it which noted the location, some of the slogans shouted, and an estimated several hundred participants -- both the CVNs and the CVBs drew positive lessons from the experience.<sup>22</sup> Although deploring how the protest had been "minimized to the extreme or deformed," the CVB newspaper *Victoire pour le Vietnam* remained proud of succeeding in getting "2500 resolute anti-imperialists

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "Manifestations à Paris à propos du Vietnam," *Le Monde* 23 February 1967.

grouped in a powerful street protest for an hour chanting slogans mastered by all of the committees: 'U.S. Assassins!' 'NLF will win!'"<sup>23</sup> They patted themselves on the back for holding together despite multiple police charges, and argued that their protest had marked a new era in the French anti-war movement, stating "The *formes d'acheminement* along with the February 21st protest's content -- radically different from the bellowing and unorganized marches done up until then -- indicate that the necessary grassroots work ahead of time had been done, that each Committee had organized its militants and sympathizers through grassroots work."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, they hoped the protest would have strong long-term effects. The Comité Vietnam de base of the Saint-Louis lycée said the protest had increased interest in their group, noting "We never had more than 15 people at meetings [before the protest], we never had less than 20 afterwards."<sup>25</sup> The CVN, which claimed the protest had drawn "around 4000 people," listed it among their accomplishments for the start of the year and cheered that the group had "held the boulevards for over an hour."<sup>26</sup> For the CVN, the meeting showed the strength of their movement and of the anti-war sentiment in France.

In the media, the most enthusiastic presentation of the protest came, seemingly strangely enough, from the far-right paper *Rivarol*, which concentrated not on what the left had accomplished but rather on Occident's violent interventions. Beginning in early February, Occident had called for counter-protests for the 21st, inviting "all students, citizens and nationalists, to join its action against the Vietcong servants and for the

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<sup>23</sup> No title, *Victoire pour le Vietnam* June 1967.

<sup>24</sup> "21 février: une manifestation offensive," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* June 1967.

<sup>25</sup> "Comité Vietnam de base du lycée Saint-Louis," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* July-August 1967.

<sup>26</sup> "Depuis le 28 novembre déjà," *Pour le Vietnam*, 1.

victory of the West."<sup>27</sup> Early in the morning on the 21st, Occident members distributing counter-protest pamphlets were attacked by "around sixty communists from the lycée Louis-le-Grand [...] armed with iron bars." They fought back, leaving two Occident members and five CVB members wounded. The real clash, however, came that evening. At 6PM, the Occident counter-protest began, starting in front of a French-Chinese exposition in the Rue de Rennes.<sup>28</sup> Moving then towards the Sorbonne while chanting "Vietcong assassins!," Occident then clashed with leftist protestors at the intersection of Boulevard Saint-Germain and Saint-Michel. Their violence, *Rivarol* noted, had the desired effect: "As this was going on, Ho Chi Minh's allies ... ran away: five hundred communists installed in the courtyard of the Sorbonne decided to evacuate the Latin Quarter, as the 'fascists' pressure was too strong. The flocks of the UNEF, the JCR, etc, split in disorder."<sup>29</sup> That evening, Radio Luxembourg interviewed an Occident member, leading *Rivarol* to proclaim, "In short, a day meant to be anti-imperialist became a day of struggle and victory for the West." The title of the article summed up their feelings nicely: "In the Latin Quarter, the friends of the Vietcong no longer lay down the law."<sup>30</sup> While the left had been able to rise above its differences for the protest, they still faced considerable opposition on the right and some indifference from the mainstream.

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<sup>27</sup> No title, *Rivarol* 9 February 1967.

<sup>28</sup> "Manifestations à Paris à propos du Vietnam," *Le Monde* 23 February 1967. *Le Monde* reported that at this point in the far-right protest, the police intervened and arrested four Occident militants.

<sup>29</sup> François Duprat, "Au Quartier Latin les amis du Vietcong ne font plus la loi," *Rivarol* 2 May 1967. As the mixing up of the JCR, the UNEF, and the Maoists indicated, *Rivarol* did not bother to separate out the various communist groups (although it did enjoy their infighting). *France-Soir* reported that the protests split up after the police intervened. "Manifestation à Paris contre la guerre U.S. au Vietnam," *France-Soir* 23 February 1967.

<sup>30</sup> Duprat, "Au Quartier Latin les amis du Vietcong ne font plus la loi."

Occident's violence and the limited press coverage made it clear the left would have to take more radical measures in order to make an impact.

**"Those Rotten French:"  
Confronting de Gaulle during the Humphrey Protests, April 1967**

The left succeeded in making a large impact in its next major undertaking, a series of protests against American Vice-President Humphrey's visit to France in early April. In these protests, the left faced off against not the far-right of Occident, but the center-right of Charles de Gaulle. De Gaulle's policies on Vietnam, so similar to those of the left, often stymied the French left's attempts to extend protest to a larger segment of the population. Through their actions during Humphrey's visit, the French left sought to diminish de Gaulle's power over France's international image and establish a new, more revolutionary identity for France. The Humphrey protests additionally demonstrated how the rising prevalence of protest groups and the more dramatic direct action they inspired, outside the realm of political parties, allowed the French left to break free of the traditional governmental political arenas controlled by de Gaulle and make diplomatic statements outside of traditional diplomatic channels.

Humphrey's visit to France at the start of April offered the perfect opportunity to take a strong and visible stand. In his trip around Europe, the Vice President aimed to inform countries about the U.S.' current actions in the world. But no such information session was planned for France. De Gaulle had already made his views on American foreign policy very clear, especially with his recent decision to remove France from NATO's military command and to evacuate American military bases in France. Yet de Gaulle intended more to assert French independence than to reject America entirely, and he still sought to maintain ties with the United States. For both sides, Humphrey's Paris

sojourn served as a symbolic interaction meant to underline the two countries' strong ties. As French newspaper *Le Monde* put it, "Obviously no one expects concrete results from [this visit], but both sides place great importance on maintaining the dialogue between these two countries."<sup>31</sup> (The *Boston Globe* took a more cynical view, claiming the only reason for coming was that "it would have been diplomatically impossible to skip the French capital" and that if Humphrey had decided to bypass Paris, "he would not have missed a thing except a good lunch at the Elysée Palace."<sup>32</sup>) In addition to the planned meetings with de Gaulle, the itinerary called for Humphrey to salute the history of French-American bonds by laying wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and at the statue of George Washington on the Place d'Iéna while giving speeches commemorating the fifty-year anniversary of American entry into World War I.

The parts of the day dedicated to formal meetings with French officials passed very cordially. Humphrey met behind closed doors with French Prime Minister Pompidou and Minister of Foreign Affairs Couve de Murville. While the content of these discussions was not released publicly, sources indicated that the group avoided discussing Vietnam and instead stuck to "topics on which they agreed and the inalienable friendship between France and America."<sup>33</sup> Toasts over lunch continued the theme of friendship, with de Gaulle raising his glass "in honor of the United States, in whom France has found a friend for over two hundred years, and who, just fifty years ago, became once again France's most glorious ally." Humphrey responded in kind, stating "the links between my

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<sup>31</sup>"La tournée Européenne du vice-président américain: M. Humphrey est reçu par le général de Gaulle," *Le Monde* 8 April 1967.

<sup>32</sup> Don Cook, "Anti-War Parisians Riot Over Humphrey," *Boston Globe* 8 April 1967.

<sup>33</sup> "Le général de Gaulle et M. Humphrey ont évité de parler des divergences entre la France et les Etats-Unis," *Le Monde* 9-10 April 1967:6; John W. Finney, "Humphrey Praises de Gaulle warmly; Crowds assail US," *New York Times* 8 April 1967.

nation and Europe, and my nation and your nation, are deep and real. They can not and they will not be suppressed."<sup>34</sup> Toasting to "the honor of the friendship that has linked our country through so many years and so many trials," Humphrey praised de Gaulle as "a man of courage who will go down in history as a great leader."<sup>35</sup> (American observers claimed that this unscripted moment brought tears to the General's eyes. French commentators, however, doubted that a compliment from an American could cause de Gaulle to cry.)<sup>36</sup> De Gaulle managed to sneak in one comment on Vietnam, working in a reference to "the difference in our prospective actions in the midst of a troubled and, alas, bloodied world."<sup>37</sup> The visit was a success for de Gaulle's conception of an independent, neutralist France with a strong role in the world. By refusing to be challenged on his views on Vietnam, and yet insisting that France could still work with the US, de Gaulle made the Humphrey visit into a friendly meeting which confirmed his foreign policy to the Americans while still marking himself as a valuable and appreciative ally.

The French left, however, was unwilling to allow this friendly exchange to represent their country. A mix of leftist groups, including the Socialist Party, the French Communist Party, the Comité Vietnam National, and the Comités Vietnam de Base called for protests during the Humphrey visit.<sup>38</sup> *L'Humanité*, the French Communist newspaper, urged its readers to come out and denounce the "travelling salesman of

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<sup>34</sup> "M. Humphrey: les liens de mon pays avec l'Europe sont profonds et réels," *Le Monde* 9-10 April 1967.

<sup>35</sup> John W. Finney, "Humphrey Praises de Gaulle warmly; Crowds assail US."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "Plusieurs milliers de manifestants ont participé à Paris aux démonstrations organisées contre la politique américaine au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 9-10 April 1967.



American aggression."<sup>39</sup> The Mouvement de la Paix encouraged Parisians to give Humphrey "a welcome that will leave him with no doubt about how much French opinion condemns the American attitude in Vietnam."<sup>40</sup> Groups responded enthusiastically to the call, and from the moment of Humphrey's arrival on French soil protestors challenged the official state declaration that France was glad to have the American Vice-President visit. As Humphrey got off his plane at Orly, he was greeted not only by the French foreign minister but also by a crowd of protestors chanting "US, Assassins!"<sup>41</sup> In a move that showed how much planning had gone into the protests, other activists were waiting on overpasses on the highway that led to Paris. As the motorcade passed, they chucked rotten eggs and dumped paint on to the cars.<sup>42</sup> The drivers were forced to change their route to Paris at the last minute to avoid a crowd waiting at their planned entrance to the city.<sup>43</sup> Although the protestors at this point were not numerous, their presence and actions offered an alternative view of how the French people truly welcomed the Vice President's visit.

Protestors had also prepared for Humphrey's trip around the city. Overnight, they had papered the walls in areas he was expected to visit with posters, some of which said "Humphrey Go Home!" in black and yellow and others of which declared "The NLF will win!" in red on black. The base of the George Washington statue at the Place d'Iéna had

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<sup>39</sup>"*L'Humanité Asks Protest,*" *New York Times* 6 April 1967:5

<sup>40</sup> "A l'occasion de la visite à Paris du vice-président le Mouvement de la Paix appelle à manifester contre l'attitude américaine au vietnam," *Le Monde* 6 April 1967:2

<sup>41</sup>"La tournée Européenne du vice-président américain: M. Humphrey est reçu par le général de Gaulle." *Le Monde* 8 April 1967.

<sup>42</sup> John W. Finney, "Humphrey Praises de Gaulle warmly; Crowds assail US,"; "Plusieurs manifestations anti-américaines ont ponctué le programme de la visite," *Le Figaro* .

<sup>43</sup> "La tournée Européenne du vice-président américain: M. Humphrey est reçu par le général de Gaulle "

been painted bright red, and a clean-up crew was barely able to remove the paint before the ceremony.<sup>44</sup> In addition to sending a clear signal to Humphrey that not all of France appreciated his visit, the decorations changed the symbolism of important French spaces. Areas that traditionally marked either heroic French exploits -- the Arc de Triomphe -- or celebrated the bond between the United States and France -- the George Washington statue -- now wore revolutionary colors and proclaimed the superiority of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. For a moment, they became visual expressions of the socialist revolutions the French left supported around the world.

The challenge to de Gaulle's efforts to present a welcoming, proud France continued during the afternoon protests. At the Arc de Triomphe, in addition to jeering at Humphrey, a group of protestors insulted French nationalism by booing as the Marseillaise was played.<sup>45</sup> More serious protests broke out at the next stop, where by laying a wreath on the statue of George Washington in the Place d'Iéna in Paris, Humphrey had intended to underline the strong and long-standing ties of friendship which bound France and the United States together. Yet as the Vice President approached the square, he was met not by friendly faces, but by a wave of hostile chants. Drowning out the bands playing the French and American national anthems, over a thousand protestors shouted repeatedly "Humphrey, Assassin!" and "Get the hell out of Vietnam!"<sup>46</sup> When they attempted to push past the barricades on the street, the police attacked, and the area descended into chaos. As the cops tried to round up the protestors,

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<sup>44</sup>"A Paris, le socle de la statue de Washington est maculé de peinture rouge," *Le Monde* 8 April 1967.

<sup>45</sup> Don Cook, "Anti-War Parisians Riot Over Humphrey."

<sup>46</sup> "Plusieurs milliers de manifestants ont participé à Paris aux démonstrations organisées contre la politique américaine au Vietnam," *Le Monde*.

a group of youths broke away and headed to the nearby American Cathedral in Paris. Before anyone could react, they yanked down the large American flag hanging from its front and set it on fire. Two American Marines who happened to be in the area were jumped and beaten. Other youths who had been pushed away from the Place d'Iéna protest by the police threw rocks through the windows of the American Express office and, apparently not aware of or not caring about the paper's liberal reputation, attacked the Paris location of the *New York Times*. When the protests finally ended, forty-six police had been injured, over one hundred fifty protestors were arrested, and, several newspapers noted, Vice President Humphrey did not look pleased.<sup>47</sup> More than simple anti-Americanism, the disruptions and targeted destructions demonstrated the intransigence of the left's Vietnam policy. Their actions made it clear that whereas de Gaulle could put aside disagreements for decorum's sake, it was not so for all the French.

Perhaps even more interesting than the afternoon protests were the events at night, for which Vice President Humphrey was not even present. (He had decided, based on his earlier public reception, to forego a planned dinner out with his wife on the Champs-Élysée in exchange for eating at his hotel.) At around 6:30, a crowd of several thousand workers and students attempted to take over the Place de la Concorde near the American Embassy, shouting out "Peace in Vietnam! US Assassin! Humphrey Go Home!" They came armed with red paint and rotten eggs, which they aimed at the large police force stationed there. Violent clashes ensued, with the police brutally beating protestors.<sup>48</sup> As

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<sup>47</sup> John W. Finney, "Humphrey Praises de Gaulle warmly; Crowds assail US;" Don Cook, "Anti-War Parisians Riot Over Humphrey;" "Plusieurs manifestations anti-américaines ont ponctué le programme de la visite," *Le Figaro*, 8-9 April 1967; "46 agents blessés, 156 interpellations," *France-Soir* 9-10 April 1967.

<sup>48</sup> "Plusieurs manifestations anti-américaines ont ponctué le programme de la visite."

that area was cleared, fighting shifted to the streets around the Opéra. Police actions became so vicious that protestors changed their cry, no longer calling out for peace in Vietnam but instead shouting out "Charonne!"<sup>49</sup> This was a reference to an infamous protest event during the French war against Algeria. Although the evocation of Charonne clearly came about as a heat-of-the-moment response to police actions, its use revealed additional aspects of the protestors' opposition to de Gaulle. First, the use of Charonne linked these protestors to previous leftist actions, inserting the Vietnam War protests into a history of anti-colonial activities. Second, the choice of Charonne implicated de Gaulle within the colonialist, repressive legacy. The Charonne protests had occurred in 1962, several years after de Gaulle had taken power, and the police who had acted then were instruments of the state under de Gaulle's control. The police chief in charge at the time, Maurice Papon, had de Gaulle's support despite his penchant for brutally crushing his opponents. By bringing up the Charonne massacre, still a passionate moment that the French commemorated yearly, the protestors implied that de Gaulle, and the governmental forces which worked for him, now as then stood for repression. That this view was not simply limited to a momentary angry recall of a six-year old event became clear through tracts produced by the Comité Vietnam National and distributed at the movement, which, American officials noted, for the first time denounced not only American imperialism in Vietnam but accused the French government of complicity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "46 agents blessés, 156 interpellations."

<sup>50</sup> Journoud, "Les relations franco-américaines," 1130, 1131. The left had in fact accused de Gaulle of complicity before, and invoked Charonne, during a late 1966 protest where police beat protestors (mentioned in the previous chapter). However, the extent of French reaction was stronger this time, and the American government was correct insofar as this marked the first time the left had pre-written accusations of Gaullist complicity, rather than delivering such judgments in the heat of the moment. "De Gaulle complice," *Tribune Socialiste* 2 December 1966.

The news of the Paris protests angered Americans at home. The French stop was just part of a multi-leg goodwill tour of Europe, and Humphrey had been booed and attacked at every stop along the way. But it was the Paris unrest which caused the greatest reaction. The American government lodged a formal protest against the flag-burning.<sup>51</sup> Outside diplomatic channels, a group of youths in Boston lodged their own protest by igniting a French tricolor in front of the French Consulate.<sup>52</sup> Pennsylvanian American Legion secretary Thomas Camarotta called for a boycott of all things French. "Real" Americans, he noted, had been horrified to see "those rotten French" burn the American flag, when, after all, these French were only free to do so because "under this same flag Americans shed their blood while the French capitulated and collaborated with the Nazis." Denouncing De Gaulle as "that senile man" who hadn't bothered to stop the protests, Camarotta suggested that the next time the French wanted to burn something, they burn themselves. He was pretty sure there was enough gas left at the military bases the French had recently forced the U.S. to evacuate.<sup>53</sup>

After a tit-for-tat demand for apologies for flag-burning by both countries, the French government and its sympathizers attempted to play down the incidents. The

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<sup>51</sup> "Après les incidents parisiens, l'ambassade des Etats-Unis remet une protestation au Quai d'Orsay," *Le Monde* 12 April 1967; Richard E. Mooney "US Scores Paris Strife During Humphrey Visit. Witnesses say police stood by as youths hit marines. Rector calls Flag-Burners 'Beatniks and Communists,'" *New York Times* 11 April 1967; "U.S. Protests Insults During Humphrey Visit," *Washington Post* 11 April 1967; "Protestation américaine à Paris à la suite des incidents de vendredi," *Le Figaro* 11 April 1967.

<sup>52</sup> "French Flag Burned in Boston," *Boston Globe*, 11 April 1967; "Après les incidents parisiens, le drapeau du consulat de France à Boston brûlé par des manifestants," *Le Monde* 12 April 1967; "Ils brûlent le drapeau français," *Le Figaro* 12 April 1967. *Le Monde's* article mistakenly reported that the flag burned belonged to the Consulate; however, in an interview with the *Boston Globe*, the flag-burner said he had bought a flag at a shop before the protest. "Flag Burner Glad Paris Mad," *Boston Globe* 13 April 1967.

<sup>53</sup> "Les manifestations anti-américaines de Paris provoquent la colère d'un dirigeant de l'American Legion," *Le Monde* 11 April 1967; Henri Lebre, "HHH ne se serait pas dérangé pour de Gaulle," *Rivarol*, April 13 1967.

American Cathedral's rector dismissed the protestors as "Communists and beatniks," while the pro-Gaullist newspaper *Paris-Presse* declared "American public opinion is sophisticated enough not to lump together the attitude of General de Gaulle and the debris of the burned flag."<sup>54</sup> French Information Minister George Gorce declared the whole event no big deal. "There is no ground for overdramatizing the incidents," he proclaimed. "A stupid performance by youngsters in Paris was followed by another stupidity in Boston. This is how the French government looks at it."<sup>55</sup>

But if the government attempted to downplay the protest, it still held significance to the French left. In the months after the visit, groups would still refer to what they simply called the "Humphrey Welcome" as a way of indicating the strength and power of protest they wanted to see happen.<sup>56</sup> In organizing and carrying out the protests against Humphrey, the leftist groups had effectively challenged the official image of France the Gaullist government wished to present to the world. Their actions forcefully demonstrated their condemnation of American actions in Vietnam, sending a message to the US about French views of American foreign policy but doing so outside of traditional diplomatic channels. The juxtaposition of the protests' hostility with de Gaulle's warm welcome highlighted the division between the government and the left, making it clear that while both had the same reaction to American involvement in Vietnam, significant differences lay between them. The day's events additionally demonstrated the power

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<sup>54</sup> Richard E. Mooney "US Scores Paris Strife During Humphrey Visit. Witnesses say police stood by as youths hit marines. Rector calls Flag-Burners 'Beatniks and Communists.'"

<sup>55</sup> "Hub Flag-Burning Target: France Unfurls Protest," *Boston Globe Evening Edition* 12 April 1967.

<sup>56</sup> See for example "Halte à l'agression américaine!" Vietnam Informations, Bulletin du Comité Etudiant Dijonnais de soutien au peuple vietnamien. N 5, April 1967, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1; Comité Vietnam Histoire, "Editorial," *Quyét Thang! Bulletin*, 2 April 1967 CAC 19870110 art 68; Laurent Schwartz, "Pour le Vietnam," *Le Monde* 21 April 1967.

potential of the left. As the French Socialist Party noted contentedly after Humphrey's departure, the protests showed "that we can effectively develop a larger, more effective, and more political movement." Finally, the protests helped the French insert themselves into a revolutionary tradition, both their own through the invocation of the Charonne massacre, and the Vietnamese Communists' through the French protestors' support of the NLF and their re-decorating of Paris. Refusing de Gaulle's push for neutralism and his willingness to work with the Americans, the French left used Hubert Humphrey's visit to trace out for the world the limitations of de Gaulle's Vietnam policy and his ability to speak for all French.

**"All Frenchmen Concerned with Justice and Peace:"  
Attempts at Unity at the National Assizes and the Estates General, April-May**

Fresh off the Humphrey action, the left moved on to two protests intended to strengthen unity among their groups: the National Assizes of the Comité Vietnam National in late April, and the "États-Généraux de la Paix" (Estates General for Peace) organized by the Mouvement de la Paix in May. Both actions aimed to bring together those involved in anti-war activity in order to better share information and work towards their common goal of ending the Vietnam War. Yet while both protests drew large numbers of participants, they revealed more dissent than unity on the left.

The Comité Vietnam National planned their Assizes as the culmination of their efforts to organize French protestors, by providing militants with a forum where they would choose a national board to oversee CVN activities. By the time the Assizes took place, the CVN had reached an impressive size, with approximately 200 local committees

signed on.<sup>57</sup> It had followed the success of the Six Hours of the World for Vietnam protest with several smaller but well-attended protests, and French journalist Jean Lacouture had deemed the group as the "most active and the most prestigious" member of the anti-war movement in France.<sup>58</sup> Coming into late April, it had, as *Tribune Socialiste* writer Marc Heurgeron showed, a lot on its agenda: "material solidarity with the Vietnamese, particularly through following up on the action undertaken by the Mouvement du Milliard; support for the Russell Tribunal Against War Crimes; denunciation of French tolerance in regard to war products destined for Vietnam; boycotts against American products; support of American deserters and resisters; welcoming representatives from Vietnam in France."<sup>59</sup> It had additionally decided, similarly to the CVBs, to make the "4 and 5 points" of the NLF and the North Vietnamese its program for peace. The move made the group distinctly more radical than the PCF. Through their works, the CVN envisioned a group which could function internationally in a manner that challenged perceived American imperialist hegemony, Gaullist complicity, and French leftist complacency.

The Assizes offered the opportunity to finalize the organizational aspects of the CVN -- Laurent Schwartz referred to the meeting as their "veritable constitutive conference" -- while also staking out an aggressive political stance.<sup>60</sup> While the CVN had

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<sup>57</sup> Flyer, no title, no date, CAC 19870110 art 68; Marc Heurgon, "Comité Vietnam National: A la pointe du combat contre l'agression américaine," *Tribune Socialiste* 6 April 1967.

<sup>58</sup> Marc Heurgon, "Comité Vietnam National: A la pointe du combat contre l'agression américaine;" "Depuis le 28 novembre déjà," *Pour le Vietnam*; Jean Lacouture, "L'Opinion française et la seconde guerre d'Indochine," *Le Monde*.

<sup>59</sup> Marc Heurgon, "Comité Vietnam National: A la pointe du combat contre l'agression américaine."

<sup>60</sup> Laurent Schwartz, "Pour le Vietnam," *Le Monde* 21 April 1967.



a provisional directory in place, it felt the time had come for more structure. "At the present time, the urgency of a political direction democratically elected is being felt more and more," reported the CVN's newspaper *Pour le Vietnam*. "It is in fact necessary for all militants, from Paris and from the provinces, to be able to meet up in order to elaborate the line to follow in the months to come, and to give themselves an organization up to carrying out the tasks that need to be accomplished[.]"<sup>61</sup> They also hoped to direct some of the attention and responsibility back to regular militants; as Marc Heurgeron noted, one of the goals of the Assizes was to "get past the habitual framework of a committee of celebrities."<sup>62</sup> The "urgency" driving the meeting came from the homefront rather than abroad. The call to attend the Assizes placed the action not simply in the face of escalating American military activity but specifically as a direct opposition to Gaullist foreign policy. "The American government is inexorably moving up the steps of its military escalation. Tomorrow, perhaps the invasion of North Vietnam or direct aggression against China," the CVN noted in announcing the meeting. "The movement for passive neutrality has long since passed. Today, we must clearly take a stand for the aggressed against the aggressor."<sup>63</sup> Where de Gaulle called for neutrality, the CVN staked a claim for a North Vietnamese victory.

The organization of the CVN operated on the principle that "a national protest movement [*mouvement de lutte*] has no sense unless it is emanates on its own,

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<sup>61</sup> "Les Assises nationales: 15-16 avril 1967," *Pour le Vietnam* 1. As the title indicates, the CVN originally planned the Assizes for April 15 and 16, in Issy-les-Moulineaux, but the police department there refused permission. The actual meeting took place in Paris. "Le Comité Vietnam National veut organiser un meeting de cent mille personnes," *Le Monde* 25 April 1967.

<sup>62</sup> Marc Heurgeron, "Comité Vietnam National: A la pointe du combat contre l'agression américaine."

<sup>63</sup> "Les Assises nationales: 15-16 avril 1967," *Pour le Vietnam* 1.

autonomously, from committees which have as their main if not exclusive goal the struggle against imperialist aggression."<sup>64</sup> In envisioning their group's struggle against American hegemony, the CVN planned for a two-part structure. On the first level, the local committees would agitate in their workplaces, providing "truthful information" (which would attack the French state by "critiqu[ing] State or capitalist information providers"), "perspective" (which would gather together all "concerned by American aggression and wishing to demonstrate their solidarity with the Vietnamese people,") and "means of action," (which included "selling Vietnamese literature, [...] conferences, film showings, [...] proposing unity to other organizations, going door to door in working-class neighborhoods.")<sup>65</sup> This grassroots activity, which closely resembled that of the CVBs, could not suffice on its own, however, and this was where the national directive came in. This national group would provide "a minimum of political coordination and a minimum of centralization of action, so that it reaches a greater extent and has more resonance and can deal with each new conjuncture (increasing escalation, diplomatic situation, etc)." The national direction would have its own specific tasks:

- coordination of committee action by diffusing information on the diverse experiences
- undertaking initiatives on a national level (protests, relations with other organizations, relations with the press, etc...)
- creating material for national propaganda (brochures, tracts) and the regular appearance of the newspaper Pour le Vietnam
- preparation and implementation of systematic campaigns, along with the committees
- international coordination<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Flyer, no title, no date, CAC 19870110 art 68.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

The CVN planned for a representative national managing committee, which would hold national meetings once every four months. In addition to this group, the local committees would also choose representatives to participate in sub-groups on specific topics, which would report back to the national group. Although setting up a rigid hierarchy, the CVN believed that this structure would allow for a greater flow of information and inspire more activity. As they put it, "Envisaged in this manner, the national direction will not be a yoke, but a true aide for the committees who will thus be in a position to let them reinforce their autonomy."<sup>67</sup>

The organization was put in place, but not without controversy. Despite the original plans for the national committee to consist of proportional representatives from each committee, the "celebrities" involved in the creation of the CVN also needed to be included.<sup>68</sup> In discussion before the meeting, attendees also argued over whether the "4 and 5 points" provided enough motivation to possible militants, an apparent indication of fear of losing potential protestors due to being too radical. In their statement, the CVN dismissed this concern, noting that while it would require effort to get people to understand why the 4 and 5 points were important, the CVN could not simply call for peace (as, at the moment, the PCF and de Gaulle were). "Since when," they asked, "is it obligatory for one to fall in with confused notions of a purely sentimental pacificism[?]" The CVN also rejected challenges that their focus on imperialism detracted from possible action for world peace, proclaiming that "going easy on imperialism is a false solution,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "Les assises du comité Vietnam National," *Tribune Socialiste* 25 April 1967.

because this can only encourage it to increase its pressure."<sup>69</sup> Most of all, they emphasized that their Assizes provided another challenge to de Gaulle's power over the anti-war movement by politicizing it. "The Gaullist government's attitude largely suffices to calm uneasiness and emotional repulsion in reaction to the war," the CVN noted. "We can only give vigor and depth to a grassroots committee movement, to a veritable fighting front, by raising political conscienciousness by demonstrating the community of interests that tie us to the Vietnamese people over and above geographic distances[.]" Their objective, they explained, was to convince the French people that their participation was not only valuable but essential to ending the war and spreading anti-imperialism. "There are," the CVN remarked, "without a doubt skeptics who are led to minimize the effects of action in a country such as ours. We must tell them that it's not at all secondary that a large front of adversaries to aggression [...] develops in France and in Western Europe." Through anti-war action in France, the militants hoped to create "a counter-escalation" that would challenge each move of the Americans and of imperialism.<sup>70</sup> Vietnam War protests would, therefore, challenge the power of de Gaulle's influence in France and, given the continuing existence of French colonies in the Atlantic region, place Gaullist France in with those who were to be resisted.

Yet conflict with de Gaulle was not the only problem facing the CVN. Their national group had also failed to connect with other groups on the same side. Although the group had professed that they had "no pretention to the exclusive direction of the struggle against American imperialism in France," as shown by their willingness to

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<sup>69</sup> "Extraits du rapport politique pour les assises nationales du Comité Vietnam National," *Tribune Socialiste* 6 April 1967.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

participate in the Mouvement de la Paix's planned Estates General for Peace, they still insisted that the goal of the Assizes was to "unify all the [anti-war] actions in France." The PCF, however, did not participate at all in the Assizes. More seriously, the CVBs did not join the national directive. Originally, when the CVBs agreed to compromise with the CVN on joint control of the February 21st protest, the two intended to plan both that action and the CVN's Assizes. But instead, the CVBs used the motivation from the February 21st protest to form their own national directive.

The CVB's group, the Organization Assembly, demonstrated some of the differences in how the CVB and the CVN functioned, specifically underlining the looser organization and greater focus on the local groups characterizing the CVBs. Rather than a directive planned for months in advance, the Organization Assembly came into being when the CVB members of the February 21st planning committee decided to continue meeting. Committees sent "comrades" to participate in the Organizations meeting, with up to 45 committees regular members. The group, which was "not an institution, [but] a weekly rendez-vous," had three functions: it helped committees work together on local actions; it held meetings where groups could keep each other informed about their actions and encourage other protests; and it helped organized centralized protests. It had its own managing group, but unlike the CVN's, this group simply organized the material and political efforts the committees put forth.<sup>71</sup> While not yet definitive, the gap between how the CVN and the CVBs functioned was growing at a fast rate.

The CVN, CVBs and the Communist groups had, despite their differences, all agreed to participate in the Mouvement de la Paix's Estates General for Peace, which

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<sup>71</sup> "Victoire pour le Vietnam," *Victoire pour le Vietnam*, June 1967.

attempted to unite "all Frenchmen concerned with justice and peace, all peaceful forces" in one meeting to discuss the direction of their anti-war action.<sup>72</sup> Called initially by a group of Communist celebrities and Mouvement de la Paix activists including Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet, the Estates General grew to involve all of the major groups and to be publicly supported by over 150 celebrities.<sup>73</sup> Drawing off its namesake, the Estates General of the French Revolution, the protest called for participants to meet and address their concerns in small local Estates prior to coming together for a large meeting on May 20th and 21st in Paris. The meeting itself resembled both Six Hours meetings, with opportunities for participants to attend various workshops such as "The Origins of the War: International Relations and the Vietnam War" or "The Role of Public Opinion: The Responsibility of Academics," followed a plenary session at which political messages would be read, and ending with cultural performances including two of Roger Pic's films, a performance by a Vietnamese student group, and poetry readings.<sup>74</sup> At the end, the group planned to put out a joint statement to show French support for the Vietnamese fighters. Through its setup and the multi-group involvement, the protest aimed to bridge gaps between different groups and work instead from their common group to move forward in unity.

Yet before the main Estates General could take place, serious clashes arose which threw the left into disarray. During the University's Estates General, which took place on May 9th at the Mutualité, Occident members attempted to attack the gathered intellectuals. They arrived in the Latin Quarter shortly after their staged protest at the

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<sup>72</sup> "Un appel en faveur des 'etats généraux pour la paix au Vietnam,' " *Le Monde* 30 April 1967.

<sup>73</sup> "Les Etats généraux pour la paix," *Le Monde* 6 May 1967.

<sup>74</sup> " Appel National, Etats Généraux de la Paix," 1967. CAC 20000529 art 2

North Vietnamese delegation's headquarters, where they had launched tear gas grenades and Molotov cocktails at the building and ripped down the Vietcong flag before the police intervened. While security at the Mutualité meant that Occident could not inflict such severe damages there, they managed to get into several fights before the police began arresting people. Although *Rivarol* complained that the sentences they received were much heavier than leftwingers had received for their part in the Humphrey protests, it noted with satisfaction "Henceforth, the fact remains that the 'reds' know that they can no longer, with complete peace of mind, display their complicity with the worst enemies of France and the free world."<sup>75</sup> While not able to stop the left-wing protests, the far right's actions reminded them that their views were not the only ones present in France.

Fisticuffs with the right were commonplace, however. The left was more surprised when actual fights broke out at a left-wing meeting in early May. Conflicts between the Maoist CVBs and the Soviet-aligned PCF had been bubbling dangerously near the surface for quite some time, a reflection locally of the Sino-Soviet split globally. The CVB and CVN's insistence on chanting "NLF will win!," in direct defiance of the Communists' chants for "Peace in Vietnam!," additionally exacerbated tensions, as seen in a May 3rd protest when a small group consisting mainly of youths hung back from the rest of the Communist-led procession, staying instead amongst themselves where they displayed Vietcong flags and called for a Vietcong victory.<sup>76</sup> Two days later, several hundred PCF members kept a Maoist meeting for Vietnam from being held by occupying

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<sup>75</sup> No title, *Rivarol* 19 May 1967.

<sup>76</sup> "La manifestation du mouvement de la paix a groupé à Paris quinze mille personnes," *Le Monde* 5 May 1967.

the reserved room at the Mutualité and refusing to leave. The two groups shouted Vietnam-related slogans at each other. Fights broke out, with, in some accounts, armed Communists attacking the Maoists and breaking chairs over their heads. Before leaving, the Communists ripped apart the propaganda the CVB members had brought with them, including copies of the *Courrier du Vietnam* and banners which read "US Nazis!" and "American Troops Out of Vietnam!"<sup>77</sup>

The fight brought the PCF-Maoist split out into the open. Each side spat recriminations at the other, revealing the severity of their differences. The Maoists, "vigorously protesting" the Communists' "savage" actions, questioned whether the Communists could really be in solidarity with the Vietnamese workers. "These hatchet men of the PCF were in no case grassroots militants," they sneered. "They were all men belonging to the apparatus, under the unconditional orders of the directors of the Party, who've become part of the bourgeoisie."<sup>78</sup> They accused the PCF of using the Vietnam War "to support their policy of demobilizing the masses in France."<sup>79</sup> *L'Humanité*, to the contrary, claimed their "more than a thousand militants" had stopped a pro-Chinese (and thus anti-proletariat) meeting, and that in its place the PCF had been able to organize a "powerful meeting of solidarity with the Vietnamese."<sup>80</sup> Shortly thereafter, *L'Humanité* unleashed its venom on the Maoist Vietnam activists, rejecting any claims that they were

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<sup>77</sup> "A Paris: Vives bagarres à l'occasion de deux manifestations en faveur de la paix au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 7-8 May 1967; "Un communiqué du Centre information Vietnam," *Le Monde* 9 May 1967. According to the article on the 7-8, Occident also attempted to take responsibility for breaking up the meeting, but it appears to have just been the work of the PCF.

<sup>78</sup> "A Paris: Vives bagarres à l'occasion de deux manifestations en faveur de la paix au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 7-8 May 1967.

<sup>79</sup> Claude Julien, "En marge des 'Etats généraux' de Pleyel, les adversaires de l'intervention américaine sont loin d'être d'accord entre eux," *Le Monde* 20 May 1967.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



sincerely involved in peace efforts for Vietnam. Claiming that their groups were led by "a few sons of the upper bourgeoisie craving 'revolution' before they head off to run papa's business" (a charge they would level almost word-for-word at the activists at the start of May '68), the PCF went on to declare that the CVBs' activities were "financed by Mao Tse-Toung's troop and also without a doubt by other areas, always ready to support any *groupuscule* aiming to fight against the party of the working class." The implication with "other areas," that the Maoists were receiving support from the Gaullist government, appeared also in the PCF's insistence that the group received press and radio coverage despite the fact that they "exercised no influence over French political life." Refusing to grant any credence to the Maoist claims of solidarity with the Vietnamese, the Communists instead declared that "the pro-Chinese in France have only one concern: to see the war in Vietnam continue and drag on." The time had come, the PCF said, to "rip the masks off" these impostors. "In no protest, wherever it was, would the veritable friends of the Vietnamese tolerate the presence of these adventurers."<sup>81</sup> The fight between the PCF and the Maoists had become a battle over who could truly claim to be anti-imperialist and who, therefore, had the greater right to reach the French working class.

When the Estates-General meetings began, the divisiveness continued in spite of the professed push for unity. Asked to participate in the local preparatory meeting for the 14th arrondissement, the Montparnasse Comité Vietnam de base accepted "with enthusiasm," looking forward to "the possibility of a unitary action." They threw themselves into the preparation, making over 500 posters, and planning a session on "the situation in Vietnam." At the actual meeting, however, they found their careful plans

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<sup>81</sup> Quoted in "'L'Humanité dénonce 'la malfaisante besogne des pro-chinois en France,'" *Le Monde* 14-15 May 1967.

thrown to the wayside. "The reunion that our committee imagined as a debate where each person could express themselves and propose concrete methods for truly and efficiently supporting the Vietnamese people," they complained, "was nothing but an interminable juxtaposition of opinions, interpretations and views often very divergent, instead of joint searching for the best means of support to offer to the Vietnamese people." Following the disjointed discussion, the group voted on a political text "intended to sum up all that had been said and serve as the base for a common action," but the CVBs claimed they and other participants found it so "confusing and ambiguous" they would not sign. Their primary critique lay in the text's avoidance of direct support for the "4 and 5 points," the "position of the Vietnamese themselves." The CVB offered themselves up as an example of how valuable taking a political line like this was. "We are currently about forty militants, each one of us knows perfectly well along which political line he has decided to support the Vietnamese people," they commented. "[T]his is why in spite of the large diversity among our beliefs and social origins, it never occurs to us to discuss endlessly, until we run out of breath, about nothing at all." The Communists' reluctance to take an aggressive political stand marked a clear separation between them and the CVBs, who insisted that their political line -- more true to the Vietnamese -- made them better activists. They ended their recounting of the meeting by proclaiming, "NO FAIR SUPPORT WITHOUT A FAIR POLITICAL LINE! NO WIDESPREAD SUPPORT WITHOUT A CLEAR AND FIRM UNIFIED POLITICAL LINE!"<sup>82</sup>

Similar divisions played out in the national media when the CVN clashed with the Mouvement de la Paix and the PCF just before the large Estates-General on May 20th

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<sup>82</sup> Comité Vietnam Montparnasse, "Développons l'action de masse!" *Victoire pour le Vietnam* June 1967.

and 21st. In a May 20th article in *Le Monde* entitled "Outside the 'Estates General' of [Salle] Pleyel, the adversaries of American intervention are far from agreeing with each other," journalist Claude Julien described the current divisions among the anti-war movement and laid most of the blame at the feet of the Communist Party. "We know the Communists' traditional repugnance of supporting movements whose structures they themselves don't control," he remarked, "and which they fear they can not lead[.]" But as he noted, the Communists' usual controlling tendencies had been complicated in this situation because of the addition of the Sino-Soviet conflict and of the PCF's subservience to Moscow, specifically in its interest in fostering "peaceful coexistence." This kept the PCF from following the "NLF will win!" line over its preferred call for "Peace in Vietnam!" More significantly, Julien revealed, the in-fighting between leftist groups was becoming public knowledge. He cited a recent article in *France-Nouvelle* where a Communist writer had accused Laurent Schwartz and the CVN of taking money intended for the Mouvement du Milliard and using it instead for their own funds. While he didn't believe it was true, he found the accusation itself to be unsettlingly damaging, as it had "provided publications that are distinctly anti-communist and hostile to Hanoi with the opportunity to publish articles that discredited Monsieur Laurent Schwartz and, through him, the Comité Vietnam National." In Julien's view, the PCF's concern with promoting itself risked -- and already had started -- harming the potential of the anti-war movement in France.<sup>83</sup>

Laurent Schwartz wrote to *Le Monde* as the Estates-General began, refuting the accusations against himself and his group and insisting again on the importance of

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<sup>83</sup> Claude Julien, "En marge des 'Etats généraux' de Pleyel, les adversaires de l'intervention américaine sont loin d'être d'accord entre eux," *Le Monde* 20 May 1967.

unity.<sup>84</sup> The main Estates-General meeting thus took place with tensions apparent -- and without the CVBs -- but with a hope for joint progress. *Tribune Socialiste* deemed the meeting itself a success, saying that the over 3000 delegates present from a variety of organizations showed that "it was possible to reach a new level in the counter-attack needed to fight American aggression."<sup>85</sup> Following the discussion panels, the Estates-General released a statement to the press celebrating the unity the meeting had demonstrated and calling the French to "increase without stopping their pressure, to end this war imposed on the Vietnamese people." "Let each French person express [their support for the Vietnamese]," the statement read, "let everyone proclaim together, with equal enthusiasm, with the same voice, throughout the country, along with peaceful forces throughout the world." They announced plans for Estate General militants to continue encouraging protests among "parties, unions, movements, organizations; scientific, literary and artistic celebrities," as well as calling for protests on June 16, 17 and 18th. The statement avoided mentioning direct support for the NLF or for the "4 and 5 points."<sup>86</sup>

Once again, divisions rose up. For militants aligned with the CVN, the political statements and the proposed future actions did not go far enough. *Tribune Socialiste* praised the accomplishments of "[g]etting together three thousand delegates in Paris, having prepared this meeting by hundreds of local debates, having reached a certain political agreement among the groups determined to fight to support the Vietnamese," but

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<sup>84</sup> Laurent Schwartz, "A propos des divisions entre les partisans de la paix au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 21-22 May 1967.

<sup>85</sup> J.C. Vaissiller, "Etats généraux pour la paix," *Tribune Socialiste* 25 May 1967.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Decornoy, "Les états généraux pour la paix au Vietnam demandent la reconnaissance du FNL et l'arrêt des bombardements du Nord," *Le Monde* 23 May 1967.

complained that only calling for "three days of action in the coming weeks without even specifying the necessary perspectives and modalities of coordination" was "insufficient."<sup>87</sup> The CVN, which had refused to support the Estates-General's statement, issued its own communiqué explaining why it had distanced itself. Also bemoaning the "insufficiency of the political text," the CVN focused in on two issues which highlighted the conflict with the PCF: the question of the NLF and the way in which the text had been adopted. By "ambiguously" presenting the NLF's role, the CVN felt the Estates-General's text risked harming the NLF's chance of participating in peace negotiations. More extensively, the CVN complained that none of the texts debated in groups during the Estates-General had been retained, implying that the general tone of the released text had been planned in advance. As with the conflict with the CVBs, the PCF's need for control and apparent hesitancy towards revolutionary action seemed to hinder anti-war actions.

Although the CVN affirmed that its "reservations [towards the released text] did not weaken at all our desire to pursue communal action," the desired group coherence of the Estates-General had clearly fallen apart. In his description of the meeting for *Le Monde*, Jacques Decornoy remarked "The word 'unity' was endlessly taken up in Salle Pleyel on Saturday and Sunday.[...] But incantation can not bridge the divides, nor can certain procedures quiet the divergences." He commented on the "lively criticism" of the political statement, particularly by the CVN, and the lack of clear directives for future action. "Everything indicates," he noted, "that the Mouvement de la Paix and the Communist party intend to remain masters of all future actions, whose dates and slogans they will determine." Although the séance's president had yelled out to the rowdy room at

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<sup>87</sup> J.C. Vaissiller, "Etats généraux pour la paix," *Tribune Socialiste* 25 May 1967. The *Tribune Socialiste* was the newspaper of the Parti Socialiste Unifié, which was a strong supporter of the CVN.

the end of debates "We are here for peace!" Decornoy pointed out that "Not even this 'magic' word, no more than the word 'unity,' could erase the ideological and political barriers[.]"<sup>88</sup> Rather than bringing together divergent groups into a common action, the Estates-General revealed decisive splits in the anti-war movement, and set up the Communist Party as the reticent opposition to the CVN and the CVB's more radical efforts.

In June, the CVBs held their own General Assembly. In the meeting, they made no pretence towards reaching unity with other groups. In fact, since May, the CVBs had declared their growing "isolation" from other groups, which they felt "tried to snuff out our actions, tried to make us take the blame for police provocations." But they embraced this isolation, noting that it was "an isolation from the false friends of the Vietnamese people, an isolation in relation to erroneous positions."<sup>89</sup> Their meeting brought together different CVBs in the Mutualité, where they shared the propaganda posters they had created and the protest methods they had developed with fellow committee members.<sup>90</sup> Although the meeting had some problems, specifically with "militants speaking for the first time in a meeting [who] don't always know to get to the point," the CVBs judged the meeting to be a successful demonstration of their "sustained support" of the Vietnamese. Additionally, they used the meeting to mark the difference between themselves and the

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<sup>88</sup> Jacques Decornoy, "Les états généraux pour la paix au Vietnam demandent la reconnaissance du FNL et l'arrêt des bombardements du Nord," *Le Monde* 23 May 1967. Two participants responded to his article. One, G. Leclercq, angrily refuted his charges of Communist manipulation, arguing that the political text had been approved by a "crushing majority." The other, Bernard Souyris, agreed with Decornoy, saying it appeared to him the political text had been "approved in advance." , "Après la réunion des états généraux pour la paix au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 30 May 1967.

<sup>89</sup> No title, May 1967. BDIC F delta 701/2.

<sup>90</sup> "Un Meeting pour le Vietnam a la Mutualité," *Le Monde* 25-26 June 1967.

other major anti-war movements. "We did not want this to be like a spectacle: no celebrity from the worlds of arts and letters came to speak," they reported in *Victoire pour le Vietnam*. "1000 people, and mainly militants present: comrades of the committees and people concerned about supporting the Vietnamese people, who knew the committees or had read their posters; no celebrities, no speeches, no 'artistic or cultural presentation,' no minutieuse ceremony."<sup>91</sup> Instead, the CVBs participated in a simple sharing of information led by the political lines of the NLF and the North Vietnamese. By singling out the celebrity aspect of the CVN and the political weakness of the PCF, the CVBs willingly highlighted their "isolation" from other groups in favor of what they saw as a closer approach to the grassroots and the French people. As the anti-war movement headed into summer, it became clear that battle lines had been drawn among the left in France, as well as on the ground in Vietnam.

### **"An Important Date in the History of the Struggle Against Imperialism:" The October 21st Protests in France**

Over the summer, the conflict between a desire for unity among groups with a similar aim, and an awareness of serious differences, continued to grow. In early July, the PCF attacked the "narrow" and "sectarian" views of the CVN, "this group directed by Laurent Schwartz." *Tribune Socialiste* deplored the PCF's reluctance to work with the CVN, noting "More than ever the support we must bring to Vietnam requires that all subaltern quarrels be put aside."<sup>92</sup> The CVN itself issued a call for leftwing unity in mid-July, asking for all anti-war activists to help "create a coordinating organization of diverse movements" that would plan actions in common over the next year, and calling

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<sup>91</sup> "Le Meeting Militant des Comités de base," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* July-August 1967.

<sup>92</sup> "Communistes et CVN," *Tribune Socialiste* 6 July 1967.

for help in planning a protest that would gather 100,000 participants in Paris. It challenged the PCF's presentation of it, arguing that "the CVN, since it was founded, has never ceased in its attempts to surmount the narrowness and the *esprit de chapelle* which up until now have blocked a frank and veritable coordination of anti-war movements." Its desire for unity motivated it once again to "restate these propositions and declare that it [the CVN] is ready to examine all suggestions or counter-propositions concerning the unification of actions against American aggression in Vietnam."<sup>93</sup> Yet the CVN's call went unanswered. In fact, the only unity achieved during the summer came on the far right, where former Algerian paratrooper Roger Holeindre succeeded in forming a French support group for South Vietnam, whose anti-communist views revealed themselves in the slogan they offered *Rivarol*: "We're for peace in Vietnam too, but not for the peace of the Red Guards, not for the peace of concentration camps, not for the peace of torturers."<sup>94</sup>

As the older far-right consolidated itself into a formal group, its younger counterpart Occident became more brazen. On October 12th, Occident attacked a Maoist exposition highlighting the progress of the Chinese people, destroying various baskets with Mao's image on them before stealing a billboard that they then doused in gas outside and lit on fire.<sup>95</sup> Chased away, they gathered near Jean-Paul Sartre's childhood home on St. Germain des Prés and burned a Chinese flag -- despite the fact that Sartre did not

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<sup>93</sup> "Le Comité vietnam national propose à nouveau une coordination des actions contre 'l'agression américaine,'" *Le Monde* 13 July 1967.

<sup>94</sup> "Impressions du Sud-Vietnam," *Rivarol* 14 September 1967.

<sup>95</sup> "Une exposition pro-chinoise mise à mal," *Rivarol* 19 October 1967; "Exposition franco-chinoise saccagée," *Le Figaro* 14-15 October 1967.



work with the Maoist students, but rather the Trotskyist.<sup>96</sup> If no one else could unify the left, it seemed, at least the right could, by lumping them all into one communist group.

As left-wing protests picked up with the start of fall and the return to school, the push for unity came again to the fore with plans for a protest on October 21st meant to coincide with the American march on the Pentagon. The CVN, which had been encouraged to create a matching protest through its contacts in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the Students for a Democratic Society, urged its militants to make the day an effective counterpart to the American protests. In a reference to the complacency de Gaulle's politics inspired in the general French population and to the small number of militants they had, the CVN admitted that "The political conditions in our country, as well as the state of our forces, do not allow us to claim to try to organize actions of a comparable size as those planned by the US anti-war movement." But they still felt that they could create powerful protests by drawing on their local committees and working with other groups.<sup>97</sup> For the CVN, this meant working with all groups "without exclusions" in an attempt to create the largest protest possible in France.<sup>98</sup>

While 32 groups in the end signed on to the October 21st protest in France, the unity between them was at most surface-deep.<sup>99</sup> In its preparations, the CVN included

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<sup>96</sup> "Un drapeau chinois brûlé à Saint-Germain des Prés," *Rivarol* 19 October 1967.

<sup>97</sup> "Le 21 octobre doit être une journée de mobilisation en France" *Pour le Vietnam*, Bulletin Intérieur du Comité Vietnam National, October 1967.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Flyer, no date, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1; "Trente-deux organisations appellent à manifester samedi de la République à la Bastille," *Le Monde* 20 October 1967. The thirty-two organizations involved were: Union Régionale Parisienne C.G.T; Section Académique du Paris du S.N.E.S. (Syndicat National des Enseignements du Second degré, classique, moderne et technique); Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire d'Action pour la Paix au Vietnam (Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur, Syndicat National CGT du personnel technique et administratif du CNRS, Syndicat National des Chercheurs Scientifiques, Syndicat National des Bibliothèques, Syndicat du personnel CGT de l'INRA, Union nationale des

plans for expected difficulties from the Mouvement de la Paix. When discussing putting together a "large meeting for solidarity with Vietnam," the CVN decided that "in the case of certain organizations refus[ing to participate], the CVN will take it upon itself to organize a meeting where representatives of American organizations can speak." For the protest itself, the CVN decided to swallow its pride in the interest of the larger cause, noting that "in the case where the Mouvement de la Paix refuses our proposition [of a joint call to a street protest in Paris on the 21st], for the sake of unity the CVN will participate in their action[.]"<sup>100</sup> Events proved the CVN correct in their concerns, as the PCF issued its own call to protest on the 21st. (The editors of *Le Monde* felt the need to point out, after reproducing the call, that a number of other organizations were involved as well, including the CVN.)<sup>101</sup>

Although the CVN did, as it had promised, fall in with the Mouvement de la Paix's protest, it still presented the protest's aims in ways that took swipes at the PCF along with the more obvious target of the French government. Writing in *Le Monde*, Laurent Schwartz declared that "this October 21st, unifying protest, must not be a day without a future." But while he noted that the protest originated from multiple groups, his

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Etudiants de France); Parti Communiste Français; Parti Socialiste Unifié; Jeune République; Club "Convention" (adhérent à la Convention des Institutions Républicaines); Fédération de la Seine de la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme; Les Amis de Temoignage Chrétien; Mouvement de la Paix; Mouvement contre l'Armement atomique; Mouvement contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et pour la Paix; Association d'Amitié franco-vietnamienne; Comité Vietnam national; Campagne du Milliard pour le FNL et la RDV; Christianisme Social; Confédération Syndicale des Familles; Union des Femmes Françaises; Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'Entraide; Union Départementale de l'UFAC de la Seine; Association des Combattants Prisonniers de Guerre de la Seine; Association des Déportés du Travail et Réfractaires de la Région Parisienne; Fédération des Groupements d'Anciens Combattants et Victimes de Guerre de la RATP; Amicale des Veuves, Ascendants, et Orphelins de Guerre; Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communist (UJCF, UJFF, UEC); Etudiants socialistes unifiés; Centre Loisirs et actions de la jeunesse; and PACS: Paris American Committee to Stopwar.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.; emphasis in the original.

<sup>101</sup> "Le PC appelle à manifester," *Le Monde* 14 October 1967.

argument for how future protest should occur went directly against the Communist party. Proclaiming that the "true 'free world' is today in Vietnam," Schwartz threw out a challenge to Gaullist diplomacy by saying that French needed to "support [Vietnam] every day, in every way, and not simply through pretty words, while passively assisting their resistance or their death." He then went on with comments that challenged the limits of Communist contributions. "We must," he wrote, "support them humanly, we must support the materially, because they need money, sanitary equipment; medicines. We must support them politically because, definitively, wars are not won by technical and military methods, but also by political actions." Through the reference to "technical and military methods," Schwartz critiqued the support provided by the Soviet Union, the PCF's leaders. It was a direct attack on the PCF's presentation of the ways to support Vietnam, as the day before the protest they had published an article proclaiming "the Vietnamese are not alone in their just combat. They have socialist countries with them, particularly the Soviet Union, which [...] has agreed to provide them even more important aide in the form of planes, missiles and arms of all sorts."<sup>102</sup> Schwartz's insistence on the importance of "political actions" placed the CVN's support of the NLF's political lines above the physical aide being offered by Communist countries and the French Communist Party, implying that although multiple groups had come together for the October 21st protest, the only ones who could go forward to truly provide the Vietnamese aide were those in line with the NLF, like the CVN.

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<sup>102</sup> René Andrieu, "Une affaire d'honneur," *L'Humanité* 21 October 1967.

The end protest brought together over thirty thousand militants from the thirty-two organizations in Paris, marching from the Place de la République to the Bastille.<sup>103</sup> The Communist party put its leaders, including Waldeck Rochet, at the front of the "human wave," which stretched down multiple streets.<sup>104</sup> Two groups stood out: a group of Vietnamese protestors, and a group of Americans, mainly belonging to the American group PACS (Paris American Committee to Stopwar, an anti-war group composed of Americans living in France). Representatives from both groups spoke as the marchers gathered at the Bastille. "French friends," the American vice-president of PACS declared, "support us until our troops unconditionally withdraw from Vietnam." The Vietnamese speaker thanked protestors for their support and said he saw "a brilliant proof of confidence in [the Vietnamese] victory" in the protest. One sour note stood out, when the last speaker, French novelist and activist Vercors, reminded the French of the help the Americans had provided in the past two World Wars, and found himself roundly booed for his efforts.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, *Tribune Socialiste* was so pleased with the protest that they declared "October 21st, 1967 is henceforth an important date in the history of the struggle against imperialism."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> "PARIS: De la République à la Bastille," *Le Figaro* 23 October 1967; "Paris: plusieurs dizaines de milliers de manifestants," *Le Monde* 24 October 1967; "Paris: Ce fut bien la plus grande...," *L'Humanité* 23 October 1967. The organizers claimed 100,000; *Le Monde* said 35,000 and *Le Figaro* "around 30,000." It is unclear if the CVBs participated. Their newspaper, *Victoire pour le Vietnam*, makes no mention of the protest in its November-December 1967 issue, but *Le Monde's* article mentions "the most anti-American slogans [being] cried by young people distributing the newspaper *Courrier du Vietnam*," the CVBs' newspaper of choice.

<sup>104</sup> "Paris: plusieurs dizaines de milliers de manifestants," *Le Monde* 24 October 1967.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Manuel Bridier, "Une évolution irréversible," *Tribune Socialiste* 26 October 1967.

For the CVN, October 21st marked a turning point in their protest methods, in particular bringing France to the fore. In what Manuel Bridier deemed an "irreversible evolution" in his *Tribune Socialiste* coverage, this protest marked the first time that calls for "NLF will win!" and "With Vietnam!" had overwhelmed the usual "bleating for peace." While the calls had been used before, this time they dominated. It might have been, Bridier admitted, a simple "evoution of vocabulary," but he felt that "the choice of words used here translates an important revision of political positions."<sup>107</sup> More importantly than switching the protestors to a more radical political view, however, the the protest also gave the CVN a jumping off point for turning their attention directly to France. In the aftermath of the protest, the CVN announced that the protest had inspired them to "move past actions aimed at a simple affirmation of solidarity in order to engage in initiatives touching political objectives of the struggle in France." In particular, they intended to attack the Atlantic Pact and any other aspect of "American 'protection'" in France. "As for Pax Americana," they declared, "it won't be for us, no more than it will be for any other people: such is the historic lesson given by the Vietnamese fighters."<sup>108</sup> Not a success in creating the unity militants had hoped for, the protest had managed to push French militants to the next level. In directly aiming their targets at the French state, the CVN challenged the Gaullist capitalist conception of France with their own more revolutionary version.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Pas, "Sortir de l'Ombre," Chapter Two.

**Ending the Year with Che and the NLF in Paris:  
The "Semaine Che Guevara" and the 7th Anniversary of the NLF Protests,  
December**

The two protests which ended the year once again highlighted the divisions on the left, showed the growing conservatism of the de Gaulle government, and demonstrated the push for a more radical identity of France. The December staging of the CVN's "Che Guevara Week" and their second "Six Hours," this one titled "Six Hours for the Victory of Vietnam," in the first week of December, as well as the CVB's celebration of the NLF's 7th anniversary at their December 20th protest, featured all of the expected characteristics of both groups and all of the attendant drama. The conflicts involved set up the tension that would help propel the actors towards the events of May '68.

When Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara died in October, the Comité Vietnam National changed their plans for a weeklong protest of "solidarity with the Vietnamese people" into plans for a weeklong protest against imperialism worldwide, in honor of Che's memory. The CVN's newspaper *Vietnam* reproduced Guevara's call to anti-imperialists to rise up and create "2, 3 Vietnams," and his iconic picture graced the front page.<sup>109</sup> But the CVN was motivated by more than Che's connection with Vietnam and a sentimental mourning for a lost revolutionary. Through the incorporation of Che and his causes, and through their growing connection with other third-world revolutionaries, the CVN intended to use the "Che Guevara Week" as a means of extending their committee's work into the anti-imperialist fight globally and, by doing so, creating an identity for the French left as key members of the revolutionary fight worldwide.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

To this end, although the protest drew upon the earlier used format of the "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam" meeting, the December 1-9 week was distinctly more international and more spectacular. Similar to the original Six Hours, this protest included a film showing (this time, the premiere of Roger Pic's *Loin du Vietnam*), and presentations from a variety of speakers. Speakers from the NLF and the North Vietnamese delegations also spoke out, as they had at the first meeting. But drawing on the international connections they had created due to their participation in the Russell Tribunal, the CVN managed to bring in Melba Hernandez, a Tribunal member and representative of the Cuban Communist Party, whose presence and comments added a strong Latin American dimension to the protest which extended beyond the simple use of Guevara's images and words. Her speech brought a new level of authenticity to the CVN's anti-imperialist stance, as she explicitly offered Cuba's support to the group.<sup>110</sup> Through this invocation of Latin American revolutions and revolutionaries, the CVN placed itself among the real anti-imperialist players around the world and challenged the complacency of the rest of the left. Manuel Bridier, speaking at the introductory session, insisted on the "interdependence of struggles fought against imperialism" and challenged those (meaning the PCF) who found Vietnam "politically dangerous," which *Tribune Socialiste* explained meant that it "dangerously troubled the comfort in which they wanted to stay installed."<sup>111</sup> By bringing in other anti-imperialist struggles, the CVN thus pushed against the PCF's support of "peaceful coexistence," and insisted upon France's role as a member of the revolutionary groups.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Remy Grillaud, "Semaine Guevara: Et maintenant le bateau," *Tribune Socialiste* 14 December 1967. The PCF did not participate in the "Che Guevara Week," nor did it cover the week in its newspaper.

But the CVN's emphasis on radicalism at the conference did not just frighten the comfortable Communists. In their most spectacular move, the CVN managed to convince the revolutionary Black Power speaker, Stokely Carmichael, to come and speak.<sup>112</sup> In his incendiary statements, where he called for a Vietnamese defeat and the destruction of the "structures of the United States," Carmichael put forth a radical and violent anti-imperialist policy that *Le Monde* reported was "applauded for several minutes" by the four to five thousand people in attendance, who were mostly young.<sup>113</sup> The support for violent action highlighted a growing split among young anti-war activists and older ones. Laurent Schwartz saw Carmichael's visit as a "strong influence" on the groups who felt that violence was necessary.<sup>114</sup> The move towards more violent and more direct action, as shown in the chapter on the Russell Tribunal, meant that participation in anti-Vietnam War activities helped create the current that would propel the youth towards the events of May '68.

In addition to separating the young and the old on the left, Carmichael's presence in France brought the difficulties of the Gaullist government to the fore once again. Upon his arrival, Carmichael found himself held by authorities at Orly airport for seventeen hours before finally being allowed entry into France. His reputation made him an undesirable person, but authorities lacked a reason to hold him. The reluctance to let Carmichael into the country followed the government's refusal to grant a visa to Vladimir Dedjier of the Russell Tribunal. Both actions reflected the growing conservatism of the

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<sup>112</sup> Carmichael, like Hernandez, had been a member of the Russell Tribunal.

<sup>113</sup> "Le 'Pouvoir noir' à la mutualité," *Le Monde* 8 December 1967.

<sup>114</sup> Laurent Schwartz, *Mathématicien*, 440.



Gaullist government, showing its conflicted relationship with anti-war activities. While during 1967 de Gaulle had continued his anti-war work, most notably deciding to allow American deserters and resisters to stay in the country and be granted work permits, he had also worked, as the Humphrey protests showed, to maintain some level of good relations with the United States.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, he clearly did not wish to allow the left-wing groups to get the upper hand. The CVN's insistence on a global anti-imperialist fight, and their rhetoric linking Gaullist France to imperialism, meant that the fight in France itself was growing ever more near.

Although equally anti-imperialist, the CVBs had not been part of the "Che Guevara Week," which featured exactly the sort of rampant use of celebrities and one-moment spectacle they deplored. Since the start of the fall, the CVBs had been more clearly marking their differences from the Comité Vietnam National. The November-December issue of their newspaper, *Vietnam*, featured an article on a Nanterre Vietnam committee which had switched allegiance from the CVN to the CVBs. Its description of its activities under the CVN perfectly encapsulated the difficulties the Comités Vietnam de Base had with them. "Discussions (unending) and confrontations (sterile); reports and counter-reports on the global strategy of imperialism and other problems just as large," the Nanterre group complained, adding they had had to deal with "invitations to eminent bourgeois celebrities; interruption and sabotage [...] to keep all serious discussion on how to support the Vietnamese from happening."<sup>116</sup> Within the Comités Vietnam de base, however, the intense focus on the Vietnamese and the insistence on letting the

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<sup>115</sup> See Richard Perrin's account of his time as a deserter in France and runner of the RITA (Resisters In The Army) network: Perrin, *G.I. Resister*, 74-76. For an excellent analysis of the evolutions of de Gaulle's relationship with the anti-war movement in France, see Pierre Journoud's dissertation.

<sup>116</sup> "L'ancien et le nouveau comité," *Vietnam* November-December 1967.

Vietnamese lead the way meant that more and better work could be done towards ending the war.

To this end, the main protest the CVBs held at the end of the year centered around a celebration of the 7th anniversary of the formation of the National Liberation Front. Cheering "seven years of heroic struggle, of exemplary struggle for exploited and oppressed people of the entire world," the CVBs urged for "a strong enthusiastic echo [to] respond to our heroic Vietnamese comrades!" through participation in a meeting at the Mutualité in Paris.<sup>117</sup> Much larger in scale than their usual gatherings, which consisted primarily of committee members, the meeting offered the CVB the chance to speak "directly to the masses of [their] country."<sup>118</sup> Three thousand five hundred participants -- by the CVB's count -- gathered together in a room decorated by the Ecole des Beaux Arts Vietnam committee with giant portraits featuring Ho Chi Minh and NLF president Nguyen Huu Tho. Surrounded by posters from each committee touting their work, the group listened to speeches about the NLF. An enthusiastic public, consisting of "[CVB] militants[,...] workers, office employees, high school students, college students," shouted over and over the slogan "NLF will win!" and applauded the talks furiously. The editors of *Victoire pour le Vietnam* marveled that the audience "seemed to want, through the vigor of its applause and the length of its cheering interventions, to participate as much as possible in this meeting to the support of the Vietnamese people."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Vive le 7e anniversaire du FNL!" Flyer, no date, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.

<sup>118</sup> "Congrès des Comités Vietnam de Base: Rapport Politique. Rapport de clôture" Mars 1968. BDIC F delta 701/2.

<sup>119</sup> "20 décembre 1967: Vive le 7e Anniversaire du FNL! Meeting des Comités de base à la mutualité," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* January 1967.

Through the protest, the CVBs aimed to separate themselves from other groups on the left. Like the CVN, they challenged the PCF's lackluster call for "Peace in Vietnam," noting that "We can not put the emphasis on 'peace' in and of itself, as if there were only one problem: 'peace' right away and by any means necessary, as if, when you got down to it, the Vietnamese would have been better off not taking up arms at all[.]" Arguing that there were in fact two peaces possible -- one from a Vietnamese victory, one from an American, they put their vote for "Vietnamese peace in independence."<sup>120</sup> The CVBs repeatedly emphasized that their support for Vietnam was a "political support," sought by the Vietnamese, which "could be nothing other than total support of the NLF, of its struggle, of its program[.]" As they explained in their meeting and in the writing, "The Comités Vietnam de base have no other political line. Their political support lies in popularizing throughout France the fight of the Vietnamese people, explaining the fight according to the positions laid out by the Vietnamese themselves, condemning American imperialism[.]" Material support did not offer enough; the CVBs needed to "for [their] part in France, contribute to isolating American imperialism by ripping the mask of its true nature for the masses."<sup>121</sup> Like the CVN, the CVBs were searching for a more radical revolution.

But while the CVBs agreed with the Comité Vietnam National on their political line, they disagreed strongly with them on other aspects of how to protest the war. The

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<sup>120</sup> "Vive le 7e anniversaire du Front National de Libération. Intervention centrale du meeting des comités de base, le 20 décembre 1967 à la Mutualité." BDIC F delta 701/2. While this used the same call as the CVNs, the CVBs still felt that the Comité Vietnam National did not support the Vietnamese deeply enough: an article in the November-December issue of the CVB newspaper criticized the Comité Vietnam National newspaper for stating that an NLF victory was a "possible thing." The CVBs insisted victory was not possible; it was definite. "Sur le journal *Vietnam*," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* November-December 1967.

<sup>121</sup> "Vive le 7e anniversaire du Front National de Libération. Intervention centrale du meeting des comités de base, le 20 décembre 1967 à la Mutualité."

CVN's continual reliance on celebrity speakers and huge events appeared superficial to the CVBs, who noted that they had achieved a strong protest on December 20th without those methods. They worked, they explained, "without any publicity effect, without any of the usual '*têtes d'affiches*,' without any celebrity 'from the world of arts and letters,' without any of these demagogic practices that the French organizations have become gluttons for[.]" Instead, they proclaimed, they had "count[ed] exclusively on the force of their political line, on the sympathy they'd found in the French people for the Vietnamese people's fights, count[ed] only on their own work of propaganda." Even more to the point, the CVBs claimed that their grassroots, non-celebrity, Vietnam-focused action had put them at the center of the anti-war movement in France. "[B]eing the only ones to celebrate, in a politically correct fashion and through mass action methods" the NLF's anniversary, the CVBs noted, demonstrated "not only that [they] were an important political force, but [also that] the *Comités Vietnam de Base* are the most strongly resolute force for the task of solidarity with the Vietnamese people."<sup>122</sup> Their presentation of their protests and their aims gave the French revolutionary potential but placed them behind the Vietnamese, supporting them as they fought on the frontlines against American imperialism.

### **Conclusion: "A New Step"**

After the December 20th meeting, the CVBs felt increasingly isolated. Having offered up for the 7th anniversary "the only protest [showing] solidarity and confidence in the Vietnamese people," they found nonetheless that the press had "kept the most complete silence on this meeting." But they comforted themselves by saying this was the

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<sup>122</sup> "Congrès des *Comités Vietnam de Base*: Rapport Politique. Rapport de clôture" March 1968, BDIC F delta 701/2.

logical result of a meeting true to their political line, with no publicity and with only true militants participating. They proclaimed proudly that "This meeting was in a new style, and by its success it is for us a new step towards mass support, enduring support."<sup>123</sup> The CVBs ended the year with approximately 75 groups and a total of 1500 militants.<sup>124</sup> Although small, they would have a large impact. In addition to continual conflict with other left-wing groups, the CVBs offered the experience of small-group grassroots action, methods which would be essential for students during the events of May '68. Although unintended, the CVBs, while working for peace in Vietnam, prepared students for conflicts in France.<sup>125</sup>

As 1967 ended, no one expected the dramatic events which would erupt five months into 1968. But the continual discussions on the revolutionary role France should play, the increasing agitation of the right-wing students and their insistence, as they repeated in December, of "forbidd[ing] Marxists entry onto university campuses," and the growing conservatism of the Gaullist government when faced with the domestic aspects of his anti-war policy, meant that actions throughout 1967 had helped to pave the way for 1968. Through their arguments, Vietnam war activists in France had set into conflict competing images of France. In 1968, they would change from the question of whether "*Occident vaincra*" or "*FNL vaincra*" to the question of who would win in France.

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<sup>123</sup> "20 décembre 1967: Vive le 7e anniversaire du FNL! Meeting des comités de base à la mutualité" *Victoire pour le Vietnam* January 1967.

<sup>124</sup> Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre," Chapter Two.

<sup>125</sup> For a more detailed study of how the inner workings of the CVBs provided training for May '68, see Laurent Jalabert's "Aux origines de la génération '68."

## Chapter Four:

### **"At the Crossroads of Culture and Militancy:" The Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire and Armand Gatti's *V Comme Vietnam* on Tour, January - June 1967**

Partway into the Clermont-Ferrand performance of Armand Gatti's *V comme Vietnam*, the stage came under attack. A commando group of mainly Parisian youths burst out of their seats, chucking stink bombs at the performers. As the noxious odor wafted through the opera house, audience members herded the perpetrators out of the building. Forced onto the street, they promptly began protesting, causing such a disturbance that the police arrested several of them. Tracts they left behind identified them as part of the "Committe France -- Young Homeland Nationalist Movement." <sup>1</sup>

The nationalist youths formed part of a wave of protestors, generally originating from Paris, who took aim at Armand Gatti's play. Two weeks later, in Deville-les-Rouens, the far-right group Occident stood at the entrance to the play and unfurled a South Vietnamese flag. The resultant uproar again required the police to intervene, detaining several members of Occident.<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Nationalist Students' Federation, in a move that mirrored the American army's practice of dropping propaganda leaflets on Vietnamese villages, showered theatergoings with flyers urging them to "End Communist aggression in Vietnam!" Gathered in front of the theater, they

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<sup>1</sup> "Incidents à propos de la guerre du Vietnam," *Le Monde* 13 May 1967.

<sup>2</sup> "La guerre du Vietnam et la situation en Asie," *Le Monde* 26 May 1967.

pulled out a North Vietnamese flag and set it on fire.irate audience members attempted to organize a counter-protest. Yet again, the police had to intercede to restore order.<sup>3</sup>

The play which inspired the young right-wingers to drive out from the capital for a night of theater in the provinces was the joint undertaking of Armand Gatti and the "Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire d'action pour la paix au Vietnam," a collection of university unions working together to protest against American involvement in Vietnam. In a move never tried before in French theater or protest history, a union hired a playwright to write a play about the war, planning to have it debut at Gatti's theater in Toulouse before taking off on a spring tour around France. Through the play's production and accompanying propaganda and protests, the CIU aimed to underline how university syndicalism operated "at the crossroads of culture and militancy."<sup>4</sup> It was a major undertaking, and, as several reviewers noted, an historic act.<sup>5</sup>

Despite its uniqueness, no historical study of Gatti's play's creation and subsequent tour exists. Several literary scholars have analyzed the work in the context of Gatti's oeuvre, but it remains absent from research on French Vietnam War protest movements and on intellectual activity in the late Sixties.<sup>6</sup> Yet *V Comme Vietnam* merits

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<sup>3</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 31 May 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Flyer, "Le Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire d'Action pour la paix au Vietnam," 1967, CAC 20000530.

<sup>5</sup> *Les Lettres Françaises* called the play's creation "an event of considerable importance" (Crombecque, "La Châtaigne' et le Peuple Combattant," *Les Lettres Francaises* 1178: 18). Gérard Guillot, underlined that the play's creation and presentation was a first for France, as did Robert Abirached, while J.N. Vuarnet for *La Vie Lyonnaise* highlighted the "originality and newness" of the play and its relation with the CIU (Gérard Guillot "Armand Gatti: V comme Vietnam et comme Vocation politique," no source or date, Fonds Armand Gatti: J 259/1 GAT D; Robert Abirached, "La forêt est en marche," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 13 April 13 1967; J.-N. Vuarnet, "V comme Vietnam d'Armand Gatti," *La Vie Lyonnaise*, June 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Several works have examined Gatti and his theater, including *V Comme Vietnam*. Most recently, Olivier Neveux provided a synopsis of *V Comme Vietnam* in a section on French plays on Vietnam in his 2007 work *Théâtres en Lutte*. He argues that the plays were unable to connect to a degree of militancy that was

a close study. An examination of the play and its production reveals shifts in French ideas about protest from the information and moral-based activities of 1965 and 1966 to a more direct action intended to engage a wider public. The tour throughout France provides historians a chance to see the relation between protest movements and a more general swath of the French public. Reaction from theatergoers -- from those who supported the play to those, like the nationalist students, who saw it as an affront to the Western world - illuminated the political split in French society and the consequent division over France's role in the world. Moreover, Gatti's conception of his work, combined with popular and critical response to the play reinvigorated an ongoing dialogue in France about the intellectual's role in society, raising issues of literary engagement and an intellectuals' responsibility to social activism. The literary interlude offered by Gatti's play's production and its reception, by demonstrating the difficulties faced by artists attempting to work both creatively and politically as well as the limitations of protest activities around the Vietnam War, provides a unique opportunity to study developments in both culture and militancy in late 1960s France.

### **"[We] Have Never Been Indifferent:" Histories of the CIU and Armand Gatti**

By the time of the play's advent in early 1967, the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire had already strongly established itself within French protest movements.

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seen in other, specifically foreign, theaters (Olivier Neveux, *Théâtres en Lutte: Le théâtre militant en France des années 1960 à aujourd'hui*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007: 35-55). Mark Kravetz looks at the play as part of the development of Gatti's theatrical oeuvre in his study of Gatti, *L'Aventure de la parole errante* (Mark Kravetz, *L'aventure de la parole errante*, Toulouse, L'Ether Vague, 1987). Dorothy Knowles gives the play a similar treatment in her interestingly-titled study of Gatti, *Armand Gatti in the Theatre: Wild Duck Against the Wind* (London: Athone Press, 1989). John Ireland includes the play in his article examining the political aspects of Gatti's theater, "Poétique et Engagement: L'écriture Quantique d'Armand Gatti" (*Europe* 2002). In general, *V Comme Vietnam* appears as one of Gatti's lesser-known (or at least lesser-studied) works.

Many of the reviews cited in this chapter came from the Université Paris VIII - Saint Denis Fonds Armand Gatti. Only the Guillot review, however, was not marked with its source or date.



They worked to stay true to the proclamation accompanying the call for the Six Hours meeting: "Academics have never been indifferent when faced with war."<sup>7</sup>

In the aftermath of the success of the May, 1966 meeting, the Collective expressed a desire to move into a new form of protest, one that would directly involve culture. Having decided on a play, they chose a playwright, Armand Gatti, who had a similar history of activism and desire to change the world behind him.

Born in 1924 to leftist parents, Gatti was only 16 years old when he joined the French Resistance. Caught a year later, he spent the remainder of the war in a work camp on the North Atlantic coast. A focus on literature and creativity drove him in his time there, leading him to believe that finding the right word at the right time -- what he called "*la parole errante*," the wandering word -- could "liberate" a man.<sup>8</sup> Upon his release, he continued work as a writer, becoming a journalist for *L'Esprit* and *Le Parisien Libéré* and traveling as far as China and Korea. He credited this experience with giving him "a vision of the world on a planetary scale."<sup>9</sup> Although not associated with a political party -- Gatti considered himself "an anarchist in regard to ideologies" -- Gatti's sentiments clearly lay on the left side of the political spectrum, and his writing reflected that.<sup>10</sup>

Although Gatti declared that he did not do political theater, finding it "too restricting," his plays often conveyed pointed commentary on a host of contemporary

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<sup>7</sup> J.M. Legay, D. Lahalle, J.F. Nallet, "Editorial," *Bulletin du Syndicat National del'Enseignement Supérieur*, Octobre 1965.

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Knowles, *Armand Gatti in the Theatre*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *Three Plays*, ed. and trans. Joseph Long (Bath: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Knowles, 71-72.

issues.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the political choices of his subject matter, Gatti wrote to challenge the idea that theater could provide a single culture to, and by extension provoke a single experience in, its audience. "I support a theater that divides, and not a theater that unifies," he explained. He refused to participate in what he saw as a bourgeois theater that presumed one mold fit all, clarifying that he strove for "a theater that divided as deeply as possible."<sup>12</sup> When his plays provoked reactions split strongly between the left and the right, as had his play on Sacco and Vanzetti, Gatti was pleased. In his view, "In theater, if everyone agrees, it's because the play is a failure."<sup>13</sup> Gatti deemed his work part of the "théâtre d'agitation" (literally "theater of agitation,"), and he worked to provoke strong reactions by "bring[ing] [...] elements" in front of the spectator to challenge them.<sup>14</sup> As he saw it,

Theater is a medium; its business is not to provide answers, or say "this is what you must do when you leave the theater." Its business is to put the issues squarely before the spectator for him to question, because when a man starts asking questions he is beginning to change, and he could one day want to change the world.<sup>15</sup>

In this way Gatti's work fit within the parameters of the "engaged" intellectual defined by Jean-Paul Sartre in the aftermath of World War II. Rejecting the idea of "art for art's sake," the "engaged" writer chose to use their creation as a means of speaking out upon, and pushing for change in, the present-day world. "To speak is to act," Sartre had

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<sup>11</sup> Bettina L. Knapp, "Interview with Armand Gatti," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* XIV 1967(4): 416.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Michaud-Mailland, Jean "Notes Au Spectateur Idéal Selon Armand Gatti," *Les Lettres Françaises* 15 June 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Nicole Zand, "Création au Grénier de Toulouse: 'V comme Vietnam' fera peut-être prendre conscience de ce que représente cette guerre, nous déclare Armand Gatti," *Le Monde* 6 April 1967.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Programme note, 'Grenier de Toulouse,' No 4, February 1967. Quoted in Knowles, *Armand Gatti in the Theatre*, 13.

proclaimed in his 1947 work *What is Literature?* "The 'engaged' writer knows that speech is action: he knows that to reveal is to change and that one can not reveal without intending to change."<sup>16</sup>

For Gatti, the central way in which to provoke changes was to write theater addressing current events. "In general, one waits for events to calm down to transport them to the stage," he remarked. "Myself, I'm for on-the-spot theater." Gatti made no attempt to hide that in this current-events reporting he was subjective, commenting "I am partisan. I take sides; I vomit those who are lukewarm, those who weigh and reweigh their options, and those who refuse to move; I'm a partisan, and I choose man."<sup>17</sup> In general, however, Gatti's plays had dealt with subject to which he had personal ties. He had neither been to Vietnam, nor deeply studied the war. But his personal and professional history made him the logical choice for the CIU. As he put it, "The theater I have written up to this point led me directly to writing a play about Vietnam. I just needed the opportunity."<sup>18</sup> When the Collective contacted him about working with them, Gatti "dropped everything" to work on the play.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* 28.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Bois, "Encontre avec Armand Gatti: La Forêt en Marche," *Reforme* 17 June 1967.

<sup>18</sup> "Création mondiale le 4 avril au théâtre SORANO, Armand Gatti et Maurice Sarrazin: 'Voici pourquoi nous remplaçons la nuit des rois par V comme Vietnam,'" *Depeche du Midi*, 25 March 1967.

<sup>19</sup> Denis Bablet, "Entretien avec Armand Gatti," *Travail Théâtral* 3(Spring 1971 April-June):6.

### **"Chestnut" vs. the Nail-Studded Plank: The Creation and Story of *V Comme Vietnam***

From the Collective's initial request at the end of 1966 to the final production touches in early February 1967, the creation of *V Comme Vietnam* took less than two months.<sup>20</sup> Gatti estimated that he wrote the entire play in under twenty-five days, finishing on January 31st.<sup>21</sup> He "threw himself" into work, reading through massive amounts of materials to get a better handle on the war in order to have as accurate a presentation as possible.<sup>22</sup> "It would take too much space to even just mention the titles of works, accounts, reports from which Gatti drew, extracted the 'real material' of his oeuvre," a critic later wrote. "Let's say simply that this 'documentation' was considerable and often first-hand."<sup>23</sup> Whereas his previous plays had deep connections to his personal life and indeed arose from his personal experiences, Gatti lacked any direct knowledge of the war and attempted to use the extensive information he had garnered to create an "experience by procuration." His distance from events often frustrated him. "They're fighting over there. I'm here," he told a journalist in 1967. "It's a terrible feeling of powerlessness."<sup>24</sup> The near-obsessive reading of news dispatches and other reports gave Gatti at least the sentiment of having a "daily experience" of the war.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> A December 1966 UNEF bulletin announced that Gatti had been asked to write the play and to tour it under the name *L'Escalade* ("The Escalation"). "Union nationale des étudiants de France," marked "édité par le secrétariat de l'UNEF fin décembre 1966," BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid and Armand Sorrano, "Création mondiale le 4 avril." Gatti also claimed to have finished writing the play in "three weeks" (quoted in Marine Monod, "*V comme Vietnam* d'Armand Gatti au Grenier de Toulouse," *Humanité Dimanche* n 111) and in "twenty days -- documentation included" (Kravetz, *Aventure*, 99). Given the amount of research he did, about twenty-five days for writing plus a week or two of research seems correct. The play was ready for rehearsals by February, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> Denis Bablet; and Gérard Guillot.

<sup>23</sup> Guillot.

<sup>24</sup> Zand.

The primary source for the play's plot ended up being French journalist Marcel Giuglaris' *Vietnam: The Day of Escalation*, a 1966 non-fiction book detailing the development of the U.S.' warplans.<sup>26</sup> Gatti drew in particular on Giuglaris' description of "Operation Silver Lance," a 1965 military training exercise that took place in Southern California as part of counter-insurgency training. The brainchild of Marine Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, the training sent 40,000 soldiers into "Lancelot," whose inhabitants, the "Lancelotians," were under threat from guerrilla bands from neighboring country "Merlin." Five thousand additional American soldiers were assigned to act as either "Lancelotians" or as members of the Merlin guerrilla units. Intended to expose American troops to the difficulties they would face in a location such as Vietnam, the exercise confronted soldiers not only with guerrilla actions but also with welcoming but clumsy locals who sometimes hindered soldiers when they attempted to help, and an ambassador whose efforts nearly derailed military actions.<sup>27</sup> Giuglaris' account deliberately highlighted the absurd aspects of the exercise. He additionally alleged that in order to make the "Lancelotians" seem foreign, the U.S. used Mexicans who spoke only in Spanish, and that during the operation, the guerrilla bandits played their parts so well they succeeded in capturing and holding for ransom the soldier playing Ambassador Cabot-Lodge -- an extremely embarrassing situation for the American troops.

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<sup>25</sup> Yvette Lucas, "Entretien avec Armand Gatti: Ecrire une pièce qui nous concerne tous, et c'est: *V comme Vietnam*," *La Dépêche*, March 4 1967.

<sup>26</sup> Marcel Giuglaris, *Vietnam: Le Jour de l'Escalade: reportage*, Gallimard: Paris, 1966.

<sup>27</sup> "Games, but Grim," *Time*, February 12, 1965.  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,839354,00.html>

As the "starting point" for the play, "Operation Silver Lance" helped overcome the problem of distance which had plagued Gatti by making that distance one of the central components of the play itself. Giuglaris claimed the exercise had provided much of the data that MacNamara and Johnson's other advisors were using to create, from a distance themselves, the data with which they would run the war. Gatti recreated this war-from-a-distance concept by placing the Pentagon and the administration's supercomputer, "Chestnut," at the center of the play, rather than focusing on action in Southeast Asia. This move underscored that for those outside of the war's theater -- the American administration in the Pentagon, Gatti himself, and the French who learned of the war through daily news reports -- "some idea of the reality of the fighting could only be arrived at through such means of communication, even [if] it was necessarily a fragmented reality."<sup>28</sup> It thus presented the war in a way that allowed for detailed representation of the ongoing actions and debates but kept it at such a distance that it mirrored how the typical Frenchman gained access to war information, making it more real to the French audience.

The story which Gatti wove around "Operation Silver Lance" tracked the events of the exercise and its effect on the American administrators and military, while simultaneously showing scenes of life among Vietnamese guerrilla fighters. From the Pentagon, senior U.S. administrators use the super computer to follow developments in the exercise and pass orders down to subordinates. Discussions among them show how their decisions on the exercise and their views on the war in general are determined by machine-based calculations which do not take into account human emotions. This proves

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<sup>28</sup> Knowles, 139.

problematic as the operation unfolds and the American soldiers assigned to play the Vietcong, Sophie and Stanley, begin sympathizing with the Vietcong's cause and acting as guerrillas. They kidnap the American ambassador, and when Sophie is caught and interrogated, she commits suicide, unable to handle the brutality of the interrogation tactics. Stanley, who until then had been a military man, announces his refusal to serve.<sup>29</sup> The administration, unable to correlate the events unfolding before them with the data upon which they base their decisions, begins to panic.

As this action occurs in the United States, Gatti continually cuts away to snippets of life and action among the Vietnamese. These actors, who appear on a separate part of the stage, generally lit by a single spotlight and invisible to the rest of the players, recount stories which undermine the data professed by the American administrators. Their tales challenge the efficacy of the strategic hamlets, explain the attraction of the Vietcong, and show the resourcefulness of the Vietnamese freedom fighter. Unlike the Americans, who are cool-headed logistical fighters at the pinnacle of modern warfare with "Chestnut," the Vietnamese are motivated by love of country and freedom and rely on more primitive methods, most notably a bamboo plank studded with nails that they use to injure U.S. foot soldiers. At a key moment in the play, the nail-studded plank is introduced to "Chestnut," which is unable to process it. The Vietnamese manage to invade a real-life American operation center in Vietnam, something that should be unthinkable, and, from there the American operation center in the Pentagon begins to crumble. The play ends with "Chestnut" melting down, spitting out the coffins of American soldiers dead in combat. Vietnamese soldiers swarm the stage as the actor

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<sup>29</sup> The character of Stanley is based in part on David Mitchell, an American resister who attempted to invoke the Nuremberg trials in his defense. Michel Roquebert, "Ce soir, à 20 h 45, au théâtre Daniel-Sorano, Création mondiale de V Comme Vietnam," *Dépêche du Midi* 4 avril 1967.

playing the play's version of MacNamara removes his mask and admits that the data was wrong: the Vietnamese are unstoppable.

Although the work of Gatti alone, the play reflects the mindset of the French non-Communist left around the war in the 1966-1967 time period. The ending in particular demonstrated the more radical views on the war that were developing. Frustrated with de Gaulle's calls for a negotiated peace and for the Communist Party's insistence on protesting for "peace" in Vietnam, the non-Communist left had begun insisting on protesting not simply against the war but specifically for a North Vietnamese/NLF victory. Supporting the Vietnamese, the UNEF noted in November 1966, involved "a refusal to comport oneself like a good Apostle for Peace."<sup>30</sup> Or, as the Trotskyist group *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire* more bluntly put it, "Enough with blubbing [pleurnichard] petitions and peace delegations!"<sup>31</sup> For this French left, to conceive of themselves as part of an international revolutionary force they needed to eschew half-measures and take a stand clearly on the side of the Vietnamese.

The ending of *V Comme Vietnam* dramatized this insistence on choosing sides for a Vietnamese victory, rather than a simple hope for a return for peace. As Quadrature, the MacNamara character, rips off his mask, Gatti breaks through the fourth wall of the theater, having the actor speak to "the Pentagon" (the audience) as an actor rather than as his character. "It is no long Quadrature who speaks to you," the actor declares, "it is [the actor's name]. My role is over, but I am none the less enclosed in the seven letters that

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<sup>30</sup> UNEF, "Communiqué de Presse," Paris 28 November 1966. BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.

<sup>31</sup> Flyer, no date, JCR. The flyer references a "May 20th" protest that probably corresponds to one that took place on May 20, 1966. BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.



make up the word VIETNAM. The entirety of humanity today is part of each of its rice paddies, each of its jungles, each of its high plains." Enumerating the ways in which Vietnam touched the world, the actor concludes, "There are guns which bring death at the end of their bullet's trajectory (these are yours). There are guns which, at the end of their bullet's trajectory, bring hope -- Vietcong will be the name of man standing upright in the sun (in our language)." With a solemn proclamation of "The forest is on the move -- let the prophecy be realized," the play ends.<sup>32</sup> Through these words and actions, Gatti underscores the non-Communist left's break with peace-only protests. Quadrature's speech to the Pentagon -- really a monologue to the French audience -- insists upon a Vietnamese victory and pushes the listener to reconsider him/herself as part of an unstoppable revolutionary force on the way to victory. In Gatti's dramatization, each Frenchman is also enclosed in the seven letters which make up "Vietnam."

In addition to demonstrating the shift in French protest politics, Gatti's play also highlighted the limited way in which the French left conceived of the Vietnam War. Reviewers of the play praised it for being non-biased. Gatti, they claimed, could not be deemed anti-American because he avoided a Vietnamese/American good/evil split, in part by including sympathetic American characters who themselves opposed the war.<sup>33</sup> Yet both Gatti's character development and his presentation of each side's motivations showed an oversimplified conception of the Vietnam War.

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<sup>32</sup> Armand Gatti, *V Comme Vietnam*, Paris: Seuil, 1967: 125-126. In the play script, Quadrature says "It is no longer Quadrature who speaks to you, it is [an actor among others.]" In performances, however, the actor would insert his name. "The forest is in march" is a reference to *Macbeth*, Act V Scene V. Thanks to Patrick O'Neil for his help on Shakespeare references in the play.

<sup>33</sup> Michel Roquebert, "Ce soir, à 20 h 45;" Crombecque, "La Châtaigne' et le Peuple Combattant;" Gérard Guillot, "Armand Gatti."

Character development was perhaps more noteworthy. Gatti's plays had always had an absurdist edge to them, and it was not lacking here, where dead American soldiers delivered soliloquys, Vietcong soldiers invaded the Pentagon, and four separate Shakespearian kings appeared on stage to dispense advice and commentary. Yet by far the most absurdist aspect of the play lay in the presentation of the American policymakers, who are thinly disguised and yet grotesque caricatures of their actual selves.<sup>34</sup> MacNamara appears as Quadrature, obsessed with living by the answers his computer provides and unwilling to even say no without qualifying that he first needs to "verify the derivation of the function 'no'."<sup>35</sup> His name, which invoked the French phrase "*C'est la quadrature du cercle*" ("It's like trying to square the circle"), indicated that his actions on Vietnam could not possibly provide a workable solution.

Quadrature/MacNamara was advised by Théo/General Earl Wheeler, Théo being short for "Théorème," or "theorem," a name which reflected an ill-advised reliance on data over experience. Cabot-Lodge showed up as Ambassador Ventriloque, or Ventriloquist, whose name undercut the effectiveness of the American diplomatic effort, limiting it to a puppet show run from Washington. The military was represented by Admiral Pointu (Admiral "Pointy-headed," a clear play on the actual Admiral Sharp) and General Bulldog, actually General Krulak, who had put together the real Operation Silver Lance and who went in real life by the nickname "Brute." Like the animal which provided his name, General Bulldog's primary characteristic was tenacity: here, absolute belief in American military power and a refusal to consider the situation through any sort of

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<sup>34</sup> Dorothy Knowles gives an excellent breakdown of the American characters and their real-life counterparts in her *Wild Duck Against the Wind*, 140.

<sup>35</sup> Gatti, *V Comme Vietnam*, 14.

emotional lens. At one point, confronted by an upset Stanley, the General exasperatedly informs him "You shouldn't look for sympathy from anyone. Sympathy is stuck in the dictionary between shit and syphilis."<sup>36</sup>

By far the most ridiculous caricature, however, was that of President Johnson, who appeared on stage in full Texas garb as "Megasherriff." Megasherriff talked "Texan" and frequently invoked his "grandfather who had been killed defending the Alamo."<sup>37</sup> He spent the majority of the play running the scene from his clinic bed (a reference to LBJ's 1965 gall bladder surgery), because he claimed that "a sick person on a large bed thinking -- that's always impressive."<sup>38</sup> Gatti's version of Johnson was constantly searching for advice, even though he told one character "With people like you, I'm going to end up not being able to find the end of my ass with my two hands."<sup>39</sup> At one point the former president General Ilike (I Like Ike) visits him in his clinic room, pushing him to use nuclear weapons. Most bizarrely of all, however, Megasherriff was beset by advice and commentary by five versions of himself, who represented the multiple sides of LBJ: the original Megasherriff, then "Megasherriff the Well-Liked," "Megasherriff the Builder," "Megasherriff the Good," and "Megasherriff the Liar." The group, Gatti noted, represented "all of the president's political career."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 61. The word "shit" is used in English in the play.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 57. Later in the play, the four extra Megasherriffs will reappear, this time in the garb of four Shakespearian tragic kings: Lear, MacBeth, Richard III, and Henry V.

In contrast, the Vietnamese characters and the remaining Americans were played straight. Each had normal names - Phuong Coi, Nguyen Hun Tang, Huyn Dinh, Sophie, Dave -- and all dressed, spoke, and acted without any unusual mannerisms. Even the two characters who had their source in historical figures lacked any caricature. Stanley, as American resistent David Mitchell, appeared as a sympathetic, thoughtful soldier overwhelmed by his situation. On the Vietnamese side, Gatti had Nguyen Van Troi, attempted assassin of MacNamara, appear in the play, but he did nothing unusual -- aside from returning from the dead, and that is clearly acknowledged as a symbolic act. His appearance points out the immortality of the Vietnamese resistance. The Vietnamese who do not have historical ties are also idealized, all lacking in faults and all supremely dedicated to their cause. This is not, however, a caricature; it demonstrated Gatti's (and by extension the French left's) idealized portrayal of the Vietnamese freedom fighter. Clearly removed from earlier racist Orientalist ideas (which Gatti has the Americans mouth), this depiction of the Vietnamese is nevertheless neo-orientalist in its own way: although no longer pejorative, its refusal to consider anything the Vietnamese do as wrong leaves them just as far removed from humanity.

The conception of the Vietnamese as noble and faultless compared with the ineffectual and unmotivated American administration continued in the plot development, where each side's war aims were drastically simplified. Gatti had already undermined the seriousness of the American war effort by presenting its main policymakers as cartoonish buffoons. Now in dialogue, he repeatedly underscored the worthlessness of American goals compared with the nobleness of Vietnamese aims. Early in the play, Dr. XXX, a psychiatrist working with the administration, reminds the policymakers that "History is

written by the victors." Quadrature immediately replies "Our cause is just because we possess all the necessary means to win," whereas Tang, off to the side, softly comments "We're fighting to defend the right of people to stage revolutions."<sup>41</sup> Bulldog, the face of the American military, operates by the book and proclaims absurdities such as "What does the Marine breviary say? You shouldn't have sex before marriage (unless you're using a condom) and only trust in God and the USA."<sup>42</sup> On the other side, however, the Vietnamese fighters have deep, poetical conversations about their battle tactics and beliefs. They plan out a new dictionary to support their revolution, featuring entries on their non-modern weapons such as "B" for "Bees' Nest" and "N" for "Nail-Studded Plank," and the titular V. After proclaiming (in accordance with both the NLF's goals and the French non-Communist left's protest aims) that they are fighting for victory rather than peace, Tang gives the Vietnamese version of Bulldog's Marine breviary. "Luyen, I would like to add something to the Encyclopedia," he announces, "an animal with a green coat (like elephant grass), difficult to capture and who once he stands tall changes the face of the world. The letter V (as in Vietnam)."<sup>43</sup>

Despite the play's apparent bias, Gatti did not believe the story amounted to a simple "denouement of a fight between the good guys and the bad guys." It was not a condemnation of American patriotism, or a support of Vietnamese communism, that provided his focus. In fact, Gatti left communism entirely out of the question, choosing to ignore the Marxist objectives of the North or the "domino theory" which had propelled

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 123.

American involvement. Rather, he aimed to show the war as a struggle between "two conceptions of mankind:" the cold, hard calculations of a life run by technology, characterized by the American style of war, and actions determined by emotions and personal experience, which he saw on the Vietnamese side. "Between these two," Gatti argued, "there can be no compromise."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Gatti believed that the fight in Vietnam necessarily implicated all of mankind, and he wanted the French audience to realize that they too needed to take a side. Gatti used the play's structure, which eschewed normal conceptions of time and space, and his words to confront the audience with the fragmented reality of Vietnam as these two versions of mankind fought in Southeast Asia. "Writing theater is not about exploiting a subject that's currently popular," he argued, "but about becoming aware, causing others to become aware, obliging them to become aware."<sup>45</sup> The best way to force this awareness came through the play's staging and subsequent tour.

### **"An Escalation of Raised Consciousness:" *V Comme Vietnam* on Tour**

"This is, let us repeat," a reporter from the newspaper *Dépêche du Midi* wrote as *V Comme Vietnam* began its run in Toulouse, "an event sufficiently unusual that we have every right to underline its importance[.]"<sup>46</sup> The production and tour planned around Gatti's play was like nothing ever seen before in France. Working with Gatti and his local theater, the Grenier de Toulouse, the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire arranged for *V Comme Vietnam* to show for twenty nights in Toulouse before beginning a tour of thirty-

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<sup>44</sup> Zand.

<sup>45</sup> Guillot.

<sup>46</sup> "A propos du spectacle du théâtre Daniel-Sorano: Pourquoi le collectif syndical universitaire a commandé à Armand Gatti 'V comme Vietnam,'" *Depeche du Midi* 11 April 1967.

two university towns around the country, including a multi-night showing at the prestigious Théâtre de l'Est in Paris.<sup>47</sup> By its end, the play would have shown 57 times in front of 38,000 spectators.<sup>48</sup>

More than a first in theater history, this union-author joint enterprise demonstrated a shift in protest methods surrounding the Vietnam War. Buoyed by the success of its "Six Hours for Vietnam," the Collective had sought out Gatti as part of a "new cultural initiative" that would "make action against the Vietnam War more sensational [*donner à l'action contre la guerre du Viet-Nam un plus grand retentissement*] and give it greater popularity, notably in the provinces."<sup>49</sup> The choice marked a sharp move away from their previous meetings, public lectures by university figures which greatly resembled American "teach-ins." The goal now, the CIU noted, was "not simply to inform the public, but to make it aware of the gravity of this war, of the consequences the war risks

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<sup>47</sup> The agreement reached between the Collective, Gatti, and the Grenier called first for twenty shows at the Grenier, replacing the planned showing of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night, or What You Will," and done using the Grenier's budget provided for the Shakespeare play. Once the Toulouse representations were finished, the Grenier would turn all actors, set decor, and other materials over to the Collective, who would finance the remainder of the shows. "Protocole d'accord entre le Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire et le Grenier de Toulouse," ca. mars 1967 CAC 20000530. The tour included the following cities: Aix-en-Provence (3 May); Marseille (4 May); Nice (5 May); Chambéry (7 May); Lausanne (8 May); Genève (9 May); Lyon (10 and 12 May); Clermont-Ferrand (11 May); Grenoble (13 May); Dijon (15 May); Strasbourg (16 May); Reims (18 May); Vernon (20 May); Rouen (22 May); Rennes (23 May); Saint-Brieuc (24 May); Brest (25 May); Nantes (26 May); Tulle (28 May); Bordeaux (29 May); Poitiers (30 May); Théâtre de l'Est - Paris (1-3-4 June); Troyes (2 June); Malakoff (6 June); Choisy (7 June); Montreuil (8 June); Amiens (9 June); Saint-Denis (10 June); Bourges (12 June); St. Etienne (13 June); Châlon (14 June); Macon (15 June). "Viet-nam" Commission Internationale, 56e congrès UNEF, Rapport de la CN Internationale sur le VN. La Commission Internationale: JL Peninou, J M Bourgeureau, JJ Hocquard 13 "Annexe I," BDIC F delta 1081/3.

<sup>48</sup> La Commission Internationale: JL Peninou, J M Bourgeureau, JJ Hocard , "Viet-nam" Commission Internationale, 56e congrès UNEF, Rapport de la CN Internationale sur le VN," 7. BDIC F delta 1081/3 Mailland, in a 1967 article in the *Magazine Littéraire*, claimed 50,000 people saw the play at Toulouse alone. However, the UNEF report's math (22 shows at Toulouse in a theater seating 600) seems more accurate. Mailland, 1967 "Trajectoire d'Armand Gatti," *Magazine Littéraire* 36: 1967.

<sup>49</sup> Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire memo, ca January 67. CAC 20000529 art 2

causing, and to bring the public to reflect upon its own position in relation to the war."<sup>50</sup>

Co-opting Johnson's term for announcing troop increases in Vietnam, the Collective said that they aimed for "an escalation of raised awareness and reflection to respond to the escalation of aggression."<sup>51</sup> The Collective's plans for producing the play and for contacting the masses during its tour, combined with Gatti's creative ideas for reaching out during the shows, provided the perfect combination of cultural and militant action.

To fully realize his vision of the play, Gatti worked closely with his long-time collaborator, Maurice Sarrazin, director of the Grenier de Toulouse. Sarrazin had embraced the idea for the play as soon as he heard of the Collective's offer. In his view, the play's topicality returned theater to its most basic function: a poet addressing his fellow citizens. "The theatrical gesture is fatally political," he argued. "In presenting *V Comme Vietnam* I have the impression of living in my time, all while performing my job exactly, which does not consist of recreating repertory pieces but in creating new objects." All would be won, he proclaimed, if the new works managed to be both good dramatically and disquieting to the general populace.<sup>52</sup>

Sarrazin's support was essential, because producing Gatti's play in Toulouse required a major upheaval for the Grenier. The Daniel Sorrano Theater, which the Grenier ran, had already produced one Gatti play in its schedule for that season, and was slated to perform Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" (in French, "La Nuit des Rois," or "Night of the Kings,") in April of 1967. Twelve thousand tickets had already been sold.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Crombecque.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Abirached, "La forêt est en marche."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



Aware that he risked upsetting ticket holders, Sarrazin decided that performing *V Comme Vietnam* was more important, and switched out the shows.<sup>54</sup> In his defense, Sarrazin argued that Shakespeare, whom Sarrazin considered a political playwright himself, would have approved of the change. "Shakespeare wrote that 'life is a story full of sound and fury,'" Sarrazin explained. "More than ever, this phrase concerns us."<sup>55</sup> In Sarrazin and Gatti's view, the "sound and fury" of the Vietnam War held just as much cultural value, if not more, than a Shakespearian classic. To underline the play's cultural importance, Sarrazin went a step beyond simply replacing "Twelfth Night" in the theater's program. For the Toulouse appearances, Gatti's play received the incredibly long name of "Shakespeare's *La Nuit des Rois*, Interpreted By the Actors of the Grenier de Toulouse Faced With the Events in Southeast Asia -- Armand Gatti's *V Comme Vietnam*."<sup>56</sup>

As was expected, the move infuriated some members of the public. Vandals smashed "two or three" of the theater office's windows, and anonymous letters encouraged people to "Crush the valets of the Vietcong!"<sup>57</sup> The virulently right-wing newspaper *Rivarol* cried out against this "Shakespeare à la sauce Vietcong," protesting the switch of a classic for a play by "a verbal, political-lyrical maniac, specialist in the anti-'fascist' struggle ([which he does by] exploiting the snobbism of Marxists in their Jaguars and the naive faith of pale and hairy students)."<sup>58</sup> The paper was convinced the

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<sup>54</sup> "Création mondiale le 4 avril au théâtre SORANO."

<sup>55</sup> Zand.

<sup>56</sup> Gatti invoked the French name for "Twelfth Night," "La Nuit des Rois," in the play itself when he had four Shakespearian kings appear on stage with Megasherriff.

<sup>57</sup> Abirached.

<sup>58</sup> B.F., *Rivarol*.

switch was the work of the Gaullist government, which they believed to be secretly supporting a Communist uprising. On the other side of the political spectrum, some complained that the Grenier's switch did not go far enough -- that such engagements should drive the theater's showings and that the theater was too politically lukewarm.<sup>59</sup> But perhaps the most important reaction to the choice for Sarrazin and Gatti came from a local Vietnamese man, who claimed "Within a few days of the creation of *V Comme Vietnam*, the maquis fighters will know that this play has been written and performed. For them this will be the most beautiful encouragement..."<sup>60</sup>

Once the switch was definitive, Gatti and Sarrazin went to work crafting a production that would reflect the political goal's of Gatti's writing. When some of the Grenier's actors expressed disappointment they would be acting in *V Comme Vietnam* rather than in Shakespeare, Gatti attempted to use this to his advantage and cast them as the hawkish Americans.<sup>61</sup> Set with his own actors in the other parts, and with Maurice Sarrazin as Quadrature -- part of the American administration, but key to the dramatization of the realization of the power of the Vietnamese -- Gatti and Sarrazin worked with Hubert Monloup to create a set which reflected Gatti's conception of the war as a fight between "two conceptions of man." Monloup responded by placing the supercomputer, "Chestnut" at the center of the stage. ("The machine takes up all the stage," Gatti crowed. "This man [MacNamara] has ended up by resembling the machine,

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<sup>59</sup> M.R., "'La nuit des rois' de Shakespeare au programme de la prochaine saison du théâtre Daniel-Sorano," *Dépêche du Midi* 27 May 1967.

<sup>60</sup> "Création mondiale le 4 avril au théâtre SORANO."

<sup>61</sup> David Bradby, *Modern French Drama 1940-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 160-161. Bradby notes that this "created tension" among the actors.

by thinking like the machine[...] and what's thinking is 'Chestnut'." <sup>62</sup>) Actors appeared on its various "screens," either via actual televisions or through trompe-l'oeil staging. Behind the stage, instead of a curtain, Monloup placed a giant sky-blue V. The letter was surrounded by the names and dates of key American battles such as Hiroshima and Geronimo. <sup>63</sup> The presence of the large "V as in Vietnam," along with the massive supercomputer which allowed them to experience the "deliriousness of the Pentagon" and the fragmented reality of the war, visually imposed the play's message on its audience. <sup>64</sup>

Just as *Quadrature* broke through the fourth wall with his mask removal at the end of the play, Gatti and Sarrazin strove to create a performance that shattered the typical boundaries of theater. The performance, in fact, consisted of three parts, only one of which was the actual play. As the curtain rose in Toulouse, spectators saw the actors in the midst of performing a scene from "Twelfth Night." Before the scene progressed far, reality broke in, as another member of the company burst on stage, reading out the day's dispatches about the war. <sup>65</sup> Having received the current reality of the war, the audience was then thrown into the actual play. But *Quadrature's* unmasking did not end their theatrical experience: after each performance, Gatti and the Collective organized discussion groups with theatergoers and with local workers who may or may not have attended the play. With this mix of the classical, the actual, the theatrical, and the

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Bois, "Encontre avec Armand Gatti: La Forêt en Marche."

<sup>63</sup> Claude Sarraute, "Au Grenier de Toulouse, 'V comme Vietnam' d'Armand Gatti", *Le Monde* 15 April 1967; Knowles, 148.

<sup>64</sup> Crombecque, 18.

<sup>65</sup> "Création mondiale le 4 avril au théâtre SORANO." It is unclear whether the beginning with Shakespeare continued after the Toulouse performances.

conversational, theater spilled into the real world as the real world spilled into the theater, creating a perfect mix of culture and militancy.

The CIU used the spectacle Gatti had created to give more oomph to some of their more traditional protest methods. Throughout the play's Toulouse run they staged outside meetings, including a multi-day event in mid-April that featured lectures on the war by American sociologists and playing of documentarian Roger Pic's anti-war films.<sup>66</sup> At each show, in Toulouse and on tour, members of the Collective (generally university students) took advantage of the play's run to poster the town, sell a variety of Vietnam-themed books, organize debates, and raise money for the Collective's project for a university library in Hanoi.<sup>67</sup>

Central to each performance, however, remained the planned discussions with audience members. Gatti relished these opportunities to interact with his viewers, and was delighted that during the *V Comme Vietnam* tour there were at times five to eight meetings a day.<sup>68</sup> The Collective had reached out especially to local workers, and various unions put tickets aside that workers "desirous of demonstrating their solidarity with Vietnam" could pick up if they wanted to attend the shows.<sup>69</sup> Local organizations scheduled meetings for Gatti to attend and speak at.<sup>70</sup> These debates, the third part of the

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<sup>66</sup> "A propos du spectacle du théâtre Daniel-Sorano: Pourquoi le collectif syndical universitaire a commandé à Armand Gatti 'V comme Viet-nam'," *Dépêche du Midi* 11 April 1967.

<sup>67</sup> La Commission Internationale: JL Peninou, J M Bourgeureau, JJ Hocard "Viet-nam."

<sup>68</sup> Kravetz, *Aventure*, 99.

<sup>69</sup> "Tourisme et Travail: Des places pour 'V comme Vietnam,'" *Dépêche du Midi* 1 April 1967.

<sup>70</sup> Amusingly, one notice for a meeting about *V Comme Vietnam* noted that audience members could also ask questions about another of Gatti's works, "Chroniques d'une planète provisoire," which "had left a lot of spectators perplexed." "Demain à la M.J.C. du Pont-des-Demoiselles Armand Gatti présentera 'V comme Vietnam,'" *Depeche du Midi* 7 April 1967.

play, were intended to continue the reflection the play had provoked and make the viewer realize they had to take action. Gatti recounted one particular dialogue between himself and an audience member which demonstrated the combined power of the play and the debate. At a mixed-class meeting in a new neighborhood, a "lady" responded to a question about what symbolism lay behind the nail-studded plank:

The lady: I understood that the nail-studded plank is the American conscientious objector, the person who says "No" to the Vietnam war. His refusal is the nail-studded plank!

Gatti: Madame, your response is that of the real spectator, the kind who brings their own intervention parallel to the play they have seen, and ends by creating their own play at the same time. Madame, I say to you "Well done!"

The lady blushed and replied: Sir, since I've seen the play, I've wanted to be a nail-studded plank myself!<sup>71</sup>

By bringing the play on tour, the Collective created its own version of the JCR's declaration "Enough with blubbering petitions and peace delegations!" The play's format challenged the typical informative meeting the Collective offered, pushing the viewers to become aware and react, rather than telling them what to think. By bringing the play on tour, and working with local groups to attract local workers and others to come out, the Collective tried to spread beyond its normal boundaries. Simultaneously, Gatti and Sarrazin's creation pushed the limits of traditional theater, mixing current events and creativity in an attempt to, as Gatti had stated, force a man to think so that he might begin to change the world. Both Gatti and the Collective's moves reflected the change underway in the French left from simply informative protest to more direct action.

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<sup>71</sup> Jean Michaud-Mailland, "Notes Au Spectateur Idéal Selon Armand Gatti."

**"A Theater That Divides":  
Critical Reaction to *V Comme Vietnam* as a Method of Protest**

The debates provoked by *V Comme Vietnam* delighted Gatti, who informed an interviewer during the play's tour that "In my view, if the show doesn't provoke fights, something's gone wrong. We've fallen into inertia."<sup>72</sup> No such problem existed for *V Comme Vietnam*. As one reviewer noted, "At every showing, there are quarrels. People are for it, people are against it, but there's always discussion [*ça fait du bruit*]."<sup>73</sup> Conversation amongst viewers at the play had its counterpart in published critiques of the play, where reviewers addressed not only the theatrical but also the political merits of Gatti's work. From these reactions, both those negative and those positive, a sense of an on-going cultural battle in France over its cultural identity, and over the role of its intellectuals, came to light.

For the French far-right, there was no question of finding merit in Gatti's work. "'V' as in 'vide!' [empty!]," the reviewer for *Le Monde et la Vie* exclaimed. "Mr. Gatti confuses that which is 'hollow' with that which is 'deep', that which is 'political' with that which is 'preachy' [.]"<sup>74</sup> Lucien Rebatet, the well-known fascist and anti-semitic intellectual, went one step further in his review for *Rivarol*. "Mr. Gatti is a primate," he sneered. Deeming Gatti a "crank deprived of all talent," Rebatet described the play and its message as "a string of asinine remarks [*âneries*] in capital letters." Unfortunately for the play's viewers, Rebatet noted, "this was not a parody. It's propaganda, equal in its vulgarity and its puerility to Pekin's wall murals and caricatures." He bemoaned the

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<sup>72</sup> Zand.

<sup>73</sup> Pierre Fisson, "Armand Gatti, l'homme qui fait grincer des dents," *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 12 June 1967.

<sup>74</sup> "V Comme Vietnam d'Armand Gatti, au TEP, pièce politique," *Le Monde et la vie* August-September 1967. *Le Monde et la vie* was a Pétainist publication.

intellectual vapidty that he claimed made Gatti produce such tripe: "Poor little poorly put-together head, incapable of an embryo of reason, of criticism, where hollow truisms ring like bells."<sup>75</sup>

Although Rebatet considered Gatti and his work "pathetic and grotesque", he nonetheless found it important to attack Gatti's play because of what he and others on the right felt the play represented: an all-out war on Western civilization, taking place in France, with the full support of the Gaullist government. Upon hearing of the planned tour, Rebatet had complained of the leftist tint of French cultural production. "[S]uburban theaters, cultural centers, none of this is anything anymore but marxist propaganda under a humanitarian mask, rehashings of Brechtian themes, dump trucks of shit disgorged onto Western man," he wrote. "Open up editor's catalogues, bourgeois weekly papers, turn on the television," he continued, "everything that's for sale today is dedicated to the emminent civlization of the Bantus, of *Négritos*, to the heroic memory of Cuban, Polish, or Spanish communists or to the endless recollection of the fascist monster, always ready, of course" he sarcastically noted, "to come back." It represented a horrific affront to French cultural traditions. "One reflects upon all the dead polemicists, half or nearly half of French literature," he commented nostalgically. "The country of Rabelais, of Agrippa, of Aubigné, of Pascal, of Rivarol, of the political articles of Chenier, of Léon Bloy and of Céline: has it degenerated to the point of passively sitting by, without even an ironic or a disgusted reflex, during this stupid liquidation, this rotting via the brain, this tidal wave of the deepest and most dismal conformism?"<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Lucien Rebatet, "Une soirée avec Armand Gatti, dramaturge officiel de la cinquième république," *Rivarol*, 22 June 1967.

<sup>76</sup> Lucien Rebatet, "La gauche qui se rue dans ses brancards," *Rivarol*, 20 April 1967.

Rebatet's use of "degenerate," with all the racial baggage it entailed, was hardly accidental. Gatti considered his play as showing the war as a combat between two types of man, one driven by technology and one guided by the heart. Rebatet and the right, however, saw it as a combat between the West and the East -- and thus between white man and the other. This right-wing conception of the war had not come about with the opening of Gatti's play. In early 1965, supporters of far-right presidential candidate Tixier-Vignancour released an announcement "respectfully saluting all American solidiers, who are not fighting against the NLF but waging the battle of the West against the yellow world."<sup>77</sup> The radical student group Occident, which participated in protests of Gatti's play, took as its motto simply "Defend the West." For the right, the frontlines of the fight for white man and Western civilization lay in the struggle against Communism. The student groups which attacked performances of Gatti's play thus invoked imagery to align themselves with the American side of the war, by releasing flyers urging an end to "Communist aggression," by displaying the South Vietnamese flag, and by burning the North Vietnamese flag. They also took pains to highlight their own place connections to white Western traditions, by emphasizing their heritage through their names: "Occident;" "Committe France -- Young Homeland Nationalist Movement."

For the French right, perhaps the most infuriating part of Gatti's play and its attack on the west was that its support of the Vietcong apparently came with the implicit approval of the French government. Rebatet christened Gatti "the official dramaturge of the Fifth Republic." "All cultural centers are open to him, bookstores and kiosks are filled with his brochures, they've organized a tour of all of France for *V Comme Vietnam*," he

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<sup>77</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 27-28 February 1966.



grumbled. "No citizen should ignore such a perfect transcription of the Elysée's politics and of the aesthetics of its favorite minister, Mr. Malraux."<sup>78</sup> While no actual direct connections to the French government existed, the CIU did hope the play would demonstrate French solidarity with the Vietnamese, drawing upon a French tradition of cultural action and protest. For the right, this was intolerable. When the nationalist students lobbed stinkbombs into the audience, they were not only protesting a pro-Vietcong showing but also refusing to allow France's cultural production to be co-opted by an anti-Western, and thus anti-white, left.

Not all negative reaction to the political elements of Gatti's play came from the right, however. In a move that demonstrated divides on the French left, the French Communist Party also protested aspects of the play. In particular, the Communists objected to Gatti's presentation of the Vietnamese as fighting on their own. "The maquisards' nail studded plank is not the only thing which disrupts Megasherrif's, Quadrature's and Bulldog's plans," the reviewer for the Communist paper *Humanité Dimanche* chided. Complaining that the only foreign aid for Vietnam appeared to come from "the activity of Berkeley students and some old quotes of Mao Tsé-Tung's," *Humanité Dimanche* opined that Gatti's writing showed "at the least, a strange lack of knowledge about the facts."<sup>79</sup> The Communist Party additionally decried one of the Vietnamese characters, Phuong's, proclamation that Vietnam was looking for "not peace but victory."<sup>80</sup> These complaints highlighted the on-going split on the French left between

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<sup>78</sup> Rebatet, "Une soirée." The aesthetics comment is a reference to Malraux's earlier literary works.

<sup>79</sup> Marine Monod, "V Comme Vietnam d'Armand Gatti au grenier de Toulouse."

<sup>80</sup> Knowles, 149.

the Communist Party, still protesting for peace in Vietnam, and a growing number of the non-Communist left who insisted upon Vietnamese victory. For the French Communist Party, protesting for peace was essential because a fight for peace fit into the Soviet line of "peaceful coexistence." While the Party correctly noted that Gatti's depiction of the Vietnam War omitted key international players, their real complaint was with his failure to highlight Soviet actions; this also was motivated by a desire to toe Moscow's line. The French Communist Party wanted absolute control over the French left, and Gatti's presentation of the war broke from the story they wished to present. The production and tour of the play, led by a group not under the Communist umbrella (and a group with which the Party had previously clashed) only served to underline that the French left was slipping further and further away from the Communist Party.<sup>81</sup>

Excluding the Communist Party's nitpickings, the French left widely approved the political message of the play. Reviewers applauded Gatti's ability to demonstrate the importance of the war. In *Le Monde*, Claude Sarraute praised Gatti's deconstruction of the American war effort, writing that the play was "the acknowledgement of a failure, of a rout: the myth of modern technology collapses faced with the eternal soul, the crazed policies of one nation explodes when it comes into contact with the wisdom of other nations."<sup>82</sup> The reviewer for *Les Lettres Françaises* extolled Gatti's illustration of the war's impact upon all mankind, even those not in Southeast Asia. Rephrasing Quadrature's closing monologue, he enthused "*V Comme Vietnam* brings out the evidence

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapter Two for more information on clashes between the PCF and the CIU over the "Six Hours" protest.

<sup>82</sup> "Au Grenier de Toulouse, 'V comme Vietnam' d'Armand Gatti."

that we are all 'enclosed' in the seven letters which make up the word VIETNAM."<sup>83</sup>

Other reviewers expressed delight in how the play drew the audience in. "No theater demands the spectator's participation as much as Gatti's, but this is not a sentimental participation," André Alter declared in the leftist Christian newspaper *Témoignage Chrétien*. "If ever a theater has been an instrument in raising consciousness, this is it."<sup>84</sup> His fellow reviewer P. -I. D. put it even more emotionally: "The enthusiastic welcome that this play receives from its passionate audience is reason to not despair in the rationality and the heart of mankind."<sup>85</sup>

### **The "Power of Literature:" Critical Reaction to Vietnam and the Question of "Engagement"**

The central issue for all reviewers, however, was not the political message of the play, but if the play had a right to be political at all. More than whether or not Gatti's play successfully convinced people of the need to pay attention to Vietnam, critics were focused on whether the play could attempt to spread a message without losing its artistic integrity. As Benoit Denis has shown, "engaged" writers looking to address their cause in their literary works walked a fine line between managing to produce simple testimony or actual literature. At all times, but especially since Sartre's call to create engaged literature, critics indicated a fear that engagement would drive literature into the realm of propaganda. While no one commented Gatti's right to draw on his social capital as an intellectual to participate in protests against the war, commentary about the play raised the issue of engaged intellectuals' politics seeping over into their creative activity. The

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<sup>83</sup> Crombecque.

<sup>84</sup> André Alter, "Les ordinateurs mènent la ronde de mort," *Témoignage Chrétien* 15 June 1967.

<sup>85</sup> P.-I. D, "V comme Vietnam," *Témoignage Chrétien* 20 April 1967.

discussion highlighted shifts in the conception of the French intellectual, revealed the right's desires for participation as intellectuals on their own, and showed changing views on what role and how the intellectual should play in political issues in modern France.

For Rebatet and the right, the engaged work's political posturing destroyed its artistic aspirations. Rebatet believed that inclusion of the Gatti's message reduced the play to, as previously noted, just "propaganda." "You say to yourself 'He's going to finally manage to spit it out, to drag out a sentence,'" he wrote in his review of *V Comme Vietnam*. "But no. He babbles on, stuttering and stammering, for an hour that we must 'promote the new man, make ideology the servant of mankind and not mankind the servant of ideology,' that the theater character must fuse with the actor and the actor with the character." Rebatet felt that the heavy-handedness of Gatti's message was only compounded by his poor actors and by his simplistic characterizations, where the Vietnamese were martyrs and the Americans were Nazis "more terrifying than Himmler because of their infatuation with technology." By placing politics into his play, Rebatet believed, Gatti lowered the quality of his oeuvre.

It did not help, of course, that Gatti and other engaged writers worked from the left in apparent or overt support of Marxism. Although Gatti's play did not explicitly mention Communism, Rebatet grouped it, as has been shown, with the other "Marxist propaganda" which made up the "dump trucks of shit disgorged onto Western man." But Rebatet's reproach to the Marxist leanings of the play held an interesting note of envy. Commenting on how Maurice Sarrazin had proudly argued that all real theater was by necessity engaged, Rebatet bitterly remarked "If only we could see shows, let's say fascist shows, in the same style as the anti-fascist Gatti! What mocking, carefully justified,

would greet them!" In part a denunciation of how engaged writing was actually limited to writing that supported leftist politics, Rebatet's comment also revealed a longing for the possibility of expressing right-wing politics in literature. Although the right decried the creative weakness they saw in engaged literature -- a fellow writer at *Rivarol* wondered in July 1967 if *engagement* wasn't "a means for many writers to guarantee themselves of an impact and an audience that their work doesn't merit on its own"<sup>86</sup> -- the cultural mandate the far right claimed to uphold had distinct political undertones of its own. Rebatet sought to preserve and continue a certain French cultural tradition when he expressed regret that Marxist-tinged literature was overrunning the "dead polemicists" who made up "half or nearly half of French literature." His list of "polemicists" included not only canonical French authors such as Rabelais and Pascal, but also well-known and controversial conservative writers who had let their politics into their work: Antoine de Rivarol, a Royalist exiled during the Revolution with a noted talent for barbed insults for whom Rebatet's paper was named; André Chenier, a conservative poet guillotined at the start of the Terror; and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, a talented novelist with a nasty anti-Semitic streak who had fled to exile with the discredited Vichy government upon France's liberation. Rebatet's choices demonstrated a desire for a creative voice for right-wing politics.

In his article deriding the announcement of the *V Comme Vietnam* tour, Rebatet deplored the "wall of silence built up around us [right-wing authors] for the past twenty-two years." His time frame linked the silencing of the right in culture to the end of World War II and thus of fascist politics, but also tied it closely to the emergence of the theory

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<sup>86</sup> "Les tablettes de Cassandre," *Rivarol* 13 July 1967.

of engaged literature. Unfortunately, Rebattet noted, the left's voice in cultural matters had become so powerful that the only way for the right's "fight against decadence" to be heard would be if they managed to get a leftist to switch sides. (It had to be possible, Rebattet argued, as not all of the left "could be struck with permanent idiocy.") Through his denunciations and wistful asides, Rebattet's reactions to Gatti's play showed more than a simple refusal of the concept of "littérature engagée." Rather, Rebattet's remarks exposed the far-right's desire to participate as engaged intellectuals on their own, dispersing their own social and creative capital.<sup>87</sup>

Although already positioned as engaged intellectuals, the left was nevertheless far from a unified view on the value of inserting politics into creative endeavors. While they did not abhor the message as Rebattet did, some critics agreed with him that in attempting to communicate his cause, Gatti abandoned his art. Matthieu Galey, writing for *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, chastized Gatti for his outlandish caricatures of the American administration. "Why destroy the relative impartiality of the play in one fell swoop by presenting puppets worthy of Punch and Judy [?]" he queried. "The theatrical construction collapses upon itself: nothing is left but a parody of propaganda[.]"<sup>88</sup> Emile Copfermann also saw the characters as "puppets," but felt that the real problem for the play was that in attempting to tell so many stories, Gatti got bogged down in confusing details. "Was his aim to show through these characters machine and man? Technology dominating man versus man dominating his destiny?," Copfermann wondered. "It's

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<sup>87</sup> For more on the French right as intellectuals, and particularly as engaged intellectuals, see Sarah Shurts' dissertation, "Redefining the Engagé: Intellectual Identity and the French Extreme Right, 1898-1968" (Ph. diss, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

<sup>88</sup> Matthieu Galey, "V comme Vietnam d'Armand Gatti," *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 8 June 1967.

possible, but frankly, I'm not sure. If that's what it was, I admit that I'm lost." Copfermann complained about the combination multiple intersecting storylines and absurdist portrayls. "Events happen on scene that totally escape us," he griped. "Who are all these sherriffs?"<sup>89</sup>

Both Copfermann and Galey acknowledged that Gatti's primary goal was not to create an artistic masterpiece, but they insisted that the aesthetic qualities still mattered. "[A] play is neither a newspaper story or an investigation," Galey declared. "Another dimension must be reached, which for Vietnam would be that of tragedy. It appears that Armand Gatti has failed in his attempt to bring one of our bloodiest present-day conflicts to the stage, because of his constant wobbling between grotesque satirical-political caricature and higher, but confused, ambitions."<sup>90</sup> Copfermann expressed similar disappointments. "Perhaps Gatti and his friends at the Grenier de Toulouse will deem my reserves uncalled for, the essential being the Vietnam War [...]," he acknowledged. "I don't underestimate the importance of what's at stake [.] I think that one of the objectives -- the political aspect -- was reached. But we were asked to give our opinions on a performance. That is what I tried to do."<sup>91</sup> In Copfermann and Galey's view, the attempt to include a strong political message derailed the creative elements the theater needed in order to be a success.

Other reviewers felt, to the contrary, that the creative demands of theater hindered Gatti's ability to make a strong political statement. The French satirical paper *Le Canard*

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<sup>89</sup> Copfermann, "'V comme Vietnam' Au T E P," *Les Lettres Françaises* 8 June 1967.

<sup>90</sup> Galey.

<sup>91</sup> Copfermann.

*Enchainé* complained that Gatti's innovative dramatic presentation resulted in an "overstuffed theater." In general no fans of Gatti's style ("We appreciate that Gatti has gone off the beaten path," their critic noted, "but why doesn't he use less torturous roads[?]"). *Le Canard Enchainé* found that his elaborate staging, including the multiple use of television screens, overwhelmed his message. "Gatti should put some of his sound effect and visual tricks machines back in the prop room, and put a few supplementary projectors in their place," the *Canard* snarked. "His intention needs to be spotlighted."<sup>92</sup>

Yet others claimed Gatti's aim was not harmed by his dramatic whistles and bells but because a dramatization of the war could not bring out the true horrors of what was going on in Southeast Asia. "Current events are too hot to be shown under theater lights," remarked the critic at *Jurinal*. "The obligatory transposition betrays the facts." For the reviewer at *La Tribune des Nations*, the fallback on dramatization also harmed attempts to organize protest movements against the war. "[T]his type of theater ends up doing exactly the opposite of what it was trying for," the critic explained. "Liberating the oppressed, revolution: it's now done from an theater seat, with the approval of unions, leftist parties and the government who, if necessary, underwrites this unoffensive enterprise." Rather than the new active method of reaching the public that the C.I.U. hoped for, the critic believed the use of Gatti's play risked turning protestors into armchair revolutionaries. What made it even worse, the critic claimed, was that they wouldn't even have enjoyed themselves in the process. "They came in [to the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien] with their desire for justice, their love of peace, and they were promised a play about Vietnam," he noted. "They saw it, and they applauded... because they couldn't

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<sup>92</sup> Télémac 2, "G comme Gatti," *Le Canard Enchainé* 21 June 1967.



do otherwise, because it would have required great intellectual courage to say that they were bored[.]”<sup>93</sup>

The critics who found that the drama of the play detracted from the real-life drama of the war seemed to be at the opposite end of the spectrum from those critics like Copfermann and Maley who found that the demands of a political agenda deprived the play of its dramatic viability. Yet in actuality, both groups viewed the play as part of the same *Catch-22*. Their comments revealed a tension which suggested that an engaged creative work necessarily neglected either its creative or its political component. For these leftist critics, the idea of a writer being socially engaged and throwing his weight behind a cause did not pose a problem, nor did they have issues with Gatti's message about the war. But they doubted that a work could attempt to both participate in political protest and make a worthwhile creative contribution, without falling short in one or the other area.

Maurice Sarrazin argued, however, that what *V comme Vietnam* demonstrated was precisely the value and necessity of combining social protest and dramatic production. "You see that it's not just a question, on our part, of a simple intellectual engagement," he told an interviewer in April. "It goes much further. [In] my eyes, such an engagement has no point unless it matches up with, on the level of professional theater, an equally important gesture. In putting on *V Comme Vietnam*, we are making a gesture that responds to an anxiety of all of contemporary theater." <sup>94</sup> Creating the play, in Sarrazin and in Gatti's view, did not limit theater but rather brought it to its essential role. Aware

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<sup>93</sup> J.-C. Dumoulin, "'V Comme Vietnam' (par le Grenier de Toulouse - au T.E.P.)," *La Tribune des Nations* 9 June 1967.

<sup>94</sup> "Création mondiale le 4 avril au théâtre SORANO."

that the work would not necessarily change how the war played out, both nevertheless considered it an important action for both theatrical production and social protest. "It would show ridiculous vanity to believe that a play could bring any type of support to those who are fighting in the rice paddies. That would be scandalous!" Gatti explained. "But I am persuaded that [...] theater can play a role, in the same way that I am persuaded that the result of the Vietnam War will change the face of the world."<sup>95</sup>

Several critics agreed that Gatti's play had once again demonstrated the political and creative viability of *théâtre engagé*. Writing for the *Dépêche du Midi*, Michel Roquebert argued that with *V Comme Vietnam* Gatti and Sarrazin had proven "that theater can be something other than a delectable aesthetic enjoyment reserved for a small group of fans cut off from the world; [proven] that it can be also, in its way, a witness to our times, to the most burning realities, to dramas whose outcome could change the face of the world, to mechanisms that could crush us all, tomorrow." He saw the play as successful both in its theatrical and its political aspects. "*V Comme Vietnam* manages the miracle of being at the same time a denunciation, a cry of alarm, a position which takes its stand without detours or ambiguities -- and theater in its purest state," Roquebert said, praising the play for being "a work filled, in its construction, its form, its language, its production, with so much creative richness and so many beauties, that in its reality truly transforms into art."<sup>96</sup> In *Le Quinzaine Littéraire*, Bernard Dort also praised Gatti for creating work that refuted the dichotomy between cultural aesthetics and current events. "With [Gatti], theater is neither an instrument of propaganda or a means of amusing one's

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<sup>95</sup> Zand.

<sup>96</sup> Michel Roquebert, "Au théâtre Daniel-Sorano de Toulouse 'V comme Vietnam' d'Armand Gatti: un pari gagné, un combat engagé," *Dépêche du Midi* 6 April 1967.

self," he proclaimed. "It is the most serious and the most cheerful game: a big puzzle that .allows the audience to compose and to recognize their own image."<sup>97</sup> Gérard Guillot felt that the way Gatti's play broke free of either political or dramatic limits solidified Gatti's place in French literature, remarking "The greatest merit of the creation of *V Comme Vietnam* is to have obliged all of those who tried to shut Gatti into a political system, all those who doubted him as an authentic creator, to recognize his importance, his liberty, his originality... rank[ing him] at the top of contemporary French drama."<sup>98</sup>

Yet even those positive reviews which felt Gatti had succeeded in marrying theater and politics also carried a tinge of regret, this time for the apparent movement of drama away from current events. For Michel Roquebert, Gatti's engaged effort had returned theater to its origins. "Do we forget that the history of Western theater began practically with a play oh, so political and 'engaged'?" he queried. "The author denounced the folly of war to his contemporaries. His name was Aeschylus.[....]" Roquebert felt that Gatti had been "courageous" to "reach out his hand across twenty-five centuries to what theater had been at its birth," and urged theatergoers to "thank God to have dared to have made this immense and yet so simple gesture of speaking to us about that which concerns us all."<sup>99</sup> Another writer for the *Dépêche du Midi* declared that Gatti's play and the tour held special significance because they "proved that contemporary theater can escape its isolation, abandon its intellectualist character, and be the grand human and social phenomenom that it should never have ceased to be."<sup>100</sup> J. Vuarnet, writing for *La Vie*

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<sup>97</sup> Bernard Dort, "Le Théâtre d'Armand Gatti," *Le Quinzaine Littéraire* [Paris], 1-15 April 1967.

<sup>98</sup> Gérard Guillot, "Armand Gatti: V comme Vietnam et comme Vocation politique."

<sup>99</sup> Roquebert.

<sup>100</sup> "A propos du spectacle du théâtre Daniel-Sorano."

*Lyonnaise*, continued along the same theme, emphasizing that theater and creative works in recent years had become too apolitical. *V Comme Vietnam*, he asserted, "revived a power of literature that we had believed lost." The impact of such theatrical acts served as a warning: without care, the influence of engaged creative acts could be lost. "We must believe in ideas, believe in theater, believe in art," Vuarnet urged, "and believe in a resolutely modern way -- or risk having the shadows lengthen."<sup>101</sup>

Such comments reflected that while debate over the value of engaged creative acts continued in France, the creative acts themselves had tapered off. Around the world, the Vietnam War had inspired a number of theatrical events, including Peter Brook's *US* in London and the Vermont Bread and Puppet Theater. But in France, the war had not inspired a large amount of work.<sup>102</sup> A couple of plays had predated *V Comme Vietnam*, but they were small productions without much resonance.<sup>103</sup> Although the moment seemed opportune -- as Roger Kanters noted in *L'Express*, war always inspired and given the Gaullist government's apparent anti-Americanism artists had no need to fear repercussions -- French theater was largely quiet.<sup>104</sup> A Scandinavian publishing company, collecting international works on the war, wondered where the French creative voice was. As a blurb on the anthology explained, "Although Guernica, and closer to home the Algerian War, struck French writers' consciousness, those in Scandinavia are astounded

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<sup>101</sup> J.-N. Vuarnet, "'V comme Vietnam' d'Armand Gatti," *La Vie Lyonnaise*, June 1967.

<sup>102</sup> See Olivier Neveux' comments on French dramatists' reactions to the war in his *Théâtres en Lutte*.

<sup>103</sup> Gérard Guillot. The plays were André Benedetto's "Napalm" and the Franc Théâtre's presentation of "La Guerre entre parenthèses."

<sup>104</sup> Robert Kanters, "Les horreurs de la guerre: 'V comme Vietnam' d'Armand Gatti et le théâtre politique," *L'Express*, 12-18 June 1967.

that the events in Vietnam have not inspired more works in France and that, for example, Armand Gatti's play is a relatively isolated testimony."<sup>105</sup>

The comparative silence of the French artistic community faced with the Vietnam war stemmed from two reasons. Firstly, the apparent lack of intervention actually revealed a shift in comment form. While few creative fictional interventions on Vietnam existed, filmed commentary, specifically in journalistic or documentary form, had exploded. The war figured heavily into television reporting, bringing the reality of the day's fighting into the living rooms of the French viewing public. Reports had an impressive effect. Responding to a 1966 segment dedicated to life in Hanoi on the popular program "Cinq colonnes à l'une," *Le Monde's* critic Robert Gauthier commented "You think you've seen it all and then you discover that not everything has been said, that the reality is even more tragic than we expected. And this without seeking to shock, simply by the succession of images [...]"<sup>106</sup> Protest meetings often included films, notably ones by French documentary filmmaker Roger Pic and Australian filmmaker Wilfred Burchett, who had strong connections to the French film community. Gatti himself, in fact, had been responsible for presenting the film section of the evening at the Comité Vietnam National's "Six Hours for the Victory of Vietnam" meeting in November

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<sup>105</sup> "Les poètes américains et la guerre du Vietnam: subsection 'Pour une anthologie internationale,'" *Le Monde* supplement 5 July 1967.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Gauthier, "L'Algérie en devenir, le vietnam en guerre à 'Cinq colonnes à la une,'" *Le Monde* 8-9 May 1966. Although these programs were supposed to be objective - they were generally split between a South Vietnam segment and a North Vietnam segment - they still revealed a strong bias towards a pro-NLF interpretation of the war. Because French TV and Radio were state controlled, the extreme rightists at *Rivarol* took this as proof of the government's support of the North and of communism. "M. Pierre Lazareffe exagère," *Rivarol* 12 May 1966.

of 1966.<sup>107</sup> Many seemed to agree with the *Jurinal* critic's observation that "'Current events are too hot to be shown under theater lights," preferring instead the vividness and perceived realness which came through the film projector.

Secondly, the move away from dramatized representations of the war also reflected a shift among French intellectuals from creating fictional works (however thinly veiled) which took a political stand, to using their previous works as support for, rather than engagement with, current issues. This represented in part the deployment of accrued social capital by well-known intellectuals. Those who, like Sartre, or Simone de Beauvoir, or François Mauriac, had previously established themselves as politically engaged, carried enough clout with them from the reception of earlier works and from their public activities to be able to take a stand on Vietnam and gather notice.

But this did not mean that creative works were absent from the scene. Rather, they took a supporting role within the drama around Vietnam, serving as background players used to attract the audience. The announcements for "Six Hours of the World for Vietnam," for example, made special note of the fact that well-known painter Max Ernst had designed the event's poster.<sup>108</sup> The Collective, during the tour of Gatti's play, organized an "Art for Peace" sale to better aid in raising money for the Hanoi library project. Works by a group of recognizable artists had been made available for purchase at prices of 100, 120 and 150 francs.<sup>109</sup> In his pamphlet essay for the sale, art critic Jean

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<sup>107</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout Compte Fait*.; "Six heures du monde pour le Vietnam," CVN flyer, 1966, BDIC 4 delta 1159/1.

<sup>108</sup> "A la Mutualité: de nombreuses personnalités étrangères participeront à la manifestation 'Six Heures pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 27-28 November 1966

<sup>109</sup> Memo, "Le Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire d'Action pour la Paix au Vietnam," June 1967 CAC 20000529 art 2.

Cassou framed the artist's participation as an engaged act. Noting that all artists approached by the Collective had donated, and that the works present "represent[ed] a complete and significant panorama of modern-day art," Cassou went on to present the show as the perfect marriage of political activism and artistic creation:

For the artists, this protest-exhibit is an act of conscience. They have, by this, shown that the artist is not a man who lives shut up in his studio, solely concerned with his productions and his relations with those who judge them and those who buy them, but a man to whom nothing of humanity remains foreign and who, like all men, takes a stand when faced with events in the world. This is his way -- and it is the most simple and the truest way -- to feel, in current events, engaged. And he knows that, doing this, he sacrifices nothing, neither of the purity, nor of the liberty of his creation. This is why the present exposition, searching to support a great human cause, that of the destiny of a people and, through them, that of peace, is also a demonstration of the artistic genius of our time.<sup>110</sup>

Cassou's conception of engagement differed radically from Gatti, and in a way that could not simply be attributed to their different artistic mediums. For Gatti, engagement meant dealing with topical issues through creative work. For Cassou, however, the artist managed to maintain independence and keep his art "pure" by creating artwork separate from political imperatives, and then contributing it to a political cause. The dearth of French creative works dedicated to Vietnam, and the popularity of events like the "Art for Peace" sale, seemed to indicate that in spite of the success of Gatti's play and its tour, Cassou's conception of artistic engagement held greater currency with the French public.

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<sup>110</sup> Jean Cassou, "Art pour la Paix" pamphlet, June 1967, CAC 20000529 art 2.

### **Conclusion: "At That Moment We Sincerely Believed"**

The *V Comme Vietnam* tour ended on June 15, 1967, with a performance at Macon. A print edition of the play came out at Editions de Seuil shortly thereafter.<sup>111</sup> Due to the popularity of the shows, the Collective announced a second tour in France in the fall.<sup>112</sup> International showings were planned for New York, Venice and Frankfurt, and the Collective approached a theater company about the possibility of arranging a performance in Algeria.<sup>113</sup> Although none of these performances occurred, the play was translated into German as "V Wie Vietnam" and performed at the Schauspielhaus in Leipzig in July, 1968.<sup>114</sup> Despite the failure to reach a large international audience, the original tour had made a mark on French theater. Its creation showed that plays could be created outside of normal circuits, with political topics, and that they would find an interested audience.<sup>115</sup>

After the play's run, the Union National des Etudiants Français put together a report for their national commission assessing the overall impact of the tour. Although they admitted they were lacking some essential information that would have allowed them to come to definitive conclusions about the success of the play (they did not, for example, have full financial results of the play), the information they did possess shed light on the difficulties the tour and the protest movement had faced.

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<sup>111</sup> JL Peninou, J M Bourgeureau, JJ Hocquard, "Vietnam;" Zand; "Aux Editions du Seuil," *Les Entretiens sur le théâtre*, September 1967; No title, *Tribune Socialiste*, 20 July 1967.

<sup>112</sup> "'V comme Vietnam' sera joué à New York, Venise, et Francfort," *Dépêche du Midi*, 24 April 1967.

<sup>113</sup> Marianne Schaub to Monsieur le Coordinateur du FLN (Monsieur Benguettat), Stockholm, 10 July 1967, CAC 20000530.

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.editions-verdier.fr/v3/auteur-gatti-1.html>

<sup>115</sup> Copfermann.



In terms of practical aspects, the UNEF noted that adequate personnel to handle set-up, especially advertising and propaganda, were not always available from all of the unions involved in the Collective. They had to wait a long time for flyers and information to become available, and these were not plentiful when they arrived. The International Committee of the Association Général des Etudiants de Lyon ended up responsible for "the essential, if not the totality, of public work," including "distributing tracts, posting posters, selling the text of the play, setting up communications with the press and with the theater." They were able to adopt an efficient system for getting publicity out, working with militants both on and off campus, but they noted that the "division of chores" did not improve over time.<sup>116</sup> The disorganization extended to a hodge-podge of ways set up to house the traveling theater troupe from Toulouse, and to the handling of funds. "A similar tour could not be organized unless we were sure in advance of the revenue," the UNEF noted, claiming that even without the final accounting done, it appeared that the deficit -- 8 million old francs -- was "greater than expected."<sup>117</sup>

More significantly, however, the UNEF report revealed that the propaganda movement intended to accompany the play's performances frequently ran into difficulties which revealed rivalries on the left, conflicts with hosts, and overall the limited reach of the protest movement. At each performance, Collective members were meant to provide an exhibition on Vietnam, sell books, set up a debate, and collect money for the Collective's university library project in Hanoi. But when the tour stopped at some of the professional theaters, their hosts did not always allow them to carry out all of their tasks.

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<sup>116</sup> JL Peninou, J M Bourgeureau, JJ Hocard, "Viet-Nam."

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

In Nice, in fact, the theater blocked them from doing any of them. At other times, Collective activists struggled not with conservative theater hosts but with a hesitant coalition of leftists. In Rouen, for example, worried about "breaking 'the unity'" between the groups involved, no debate was able to be had. The political groups involved expressed concern that "*provocateurs*" -- the term for extreme-left activists, generally Maoists -- would show up and bother the "*tieds*" (individuals with half-hearted involvement).<sup>118</sup> But even more important than the times when debates could not be organized was the issue of who was there when debates were held. Except for five towns (Lyon, Brest, Tulle, Troyes, and Nantes), the UNEF felt that the majority of the people at the play and participating in the conversation afterwards were connected to the university milieu. Despite the tour's publicity and its movement around France, the organizers had not been able to expand beyond those people they generally consorted with. In short, as they put it: "We reached a public that was already convinced."<sup>119</sup>

Upon reflection, Armand Gatti too came to feel that the play and its tour had not made the kind of connections it sought. In a 1971 interview with Denis Bablet, he explained that while he had "dropped everything to jump into work on the play, because it seemed to correspond to something for me," he and the other participants quickly realized the "infinite number" of difficulties they faced. In Gatti's view, for such a political play to have its full effect everyone involved in its production needed to share its views. "We realized we couldn't do political theater like that with an established theater corps, that it wouldn't do to have just any actor, but that we needed actors politically

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

prepared and ready to lead this fight like a real fight, in it for the long run," he explained. The difficulty came in part from the set-up of bourgeois theater in France. "[P]olitical combat is an immediate response, and theater is an institution that is often slow," Gatti noted. "To set up [*V Comme Vietnam*] we needed locations that belonged to this person and that person, and if all of them were not in solidarity with the fight for Vietnam little leaks sprung up everywhere."<sup>120</sup> His comments echoed the U.N.E.F.'s report of difficulties with establishing the propaganda aspect of the tour at various theaters around France. As a protest movement which often depended on people exterior to its cause, the tour and activism around *V Comme Vietnam* frequently ran into insurmountable roadblocks.

Gatti also came to critique the public debates which surrounded the play and his theatrical work of the period in general, considering them later on as an activity for leftist intellectuals that never really reached a more general public. "For a whole period of time, I played my role of a product of the left," he told Marc Kravetz in 1987. He admitted that at the time he had really enjoyed his meetings with the workers and his relations with various workers unions, but he doubted he had actually transmitted a message. "For each play there were always fifteen or so factories or businesses to visit," he remembered. "[T]his let me carry on what I thought to be a dialogue, but what I'd more likely see nowadays as a variant of marketing."<sup>121</sup> He explained to Bablet that he connected this to a mistakenly elitist understanding in all of French intellectual activity of the time of how to reach the general public, and specifically the working classes. "At that time we sincerely

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<sup>120</sup> Denis Bablet, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Kravetz, *Aventure*, 98-99

believed that to bring culture to the workers was to bring them a weapon," Gatti said, "that the fact of putting their daily alienation through the lens of culture would better allow them to respond to a boss, to insert themselves into the class struggle."<sup>122</sup> The uprisings of May '68 changed his views on the value of "engaged" work drastically. "May made the contradictions explode," he stated. "We realized that at the bottom of it all, we were looking more to justify our role, to find ourselves a useful place in this society, in this system, than to have a real action."<sup>123</sup> Inspired by his frustrations in staging *V Comme Vietnam* and his philosophical reactions to the May uprising, Gatti moved to change his theater style. Rather than a production which brought a message to the people, Gatti strove after '68 for a theater that involved the people in the creation of its message.<sup>124</sup> He attempted to work less with large theater companies and instead did small street productions, although his plays still got widespread attention. Ironically, one of his returns to a bigger production, the 1969 attempt to stage "The Passion of General Franco," a play critical of fascist Spain, was banned by a French government which had become more conservative in the post-May era.

Prior to the tour opening, the Collective had published a query it felt summarized the importance of the play's undertaking: "Should theater limit itself to being nothing more than an indirect discourse on history and reality or can it take as its subject the most burning issue of the day, and bring it on stage so that it becomes an exemplary image

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<sup>122</sup> Bablet, 4.

<sup>123</sup> Bablet, 5.

<sup>124</sup> This shift took place in other theater organizations as well. For more information on French theater after the May events, see: Françoise Kourilsky and Lenora Champagne, "Political Theater in France Since 1968," (*The Drama Review* 19:2 June 1975): 43-52; and Leonora Champagne, "The Beach Beneath the Paving Stones: May 1968 and French Theater," (*SubStance*, 1977):59-71.

which can cause action on this issue?"<sup>125</sup> The historic undertaking of *V Comme Vietnam*'s creation and production demonstrated that at the very least there existed a strong passion which wished to link theater and culture to current events and use the two together for activist purposes. But the play's own biased set-up, the difficulties encountered during the tour, and the critical reception of the work showed more about divisions in French society than about the power of a culture-based protest movement. The play demonstrated the narrow view of the French left on the war, and reaction to its politics highlighted the depth of an already-known rift in French politics over the international role of France. Debate in the critical commentary over the function of the intellectual exposed the ongoing French concern over the possibility of mixing creative enterprises with political activism while simultaneously demonstrating that creative activities had in fact moved to a supporting role for engaged political activists. A valiant effort, in the end *V Comme Vietnam* showed nothing more clearly than the drama inherent for those who in 1967 tried to stand at the crossroads of culture and militancy.

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<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Guillot.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **"Against the Crime of Silence:" French Intellectual Protestors and the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, 1966-1967**

Gisèle Halimi climbed carefully into the remnants of the North Vietnamese bomb shelter. There on the ground in front of her lay the body of a six year old girl, Nguyen Thi Han, a Vietnamese peasant child. The force of the explosion had blown the child's brains, nearly intact, out of her skull. Her young face was spattered with blood. As Halimi and the villagers stared in horror at her prostrate form, the mother arrived from nearby fields. Prior to leaving home that day, she had had four children; now, only three. News of her loss drove her into a frenzy. Desperate with grief, she grabbed on to Halimi. "They're assassins! Assassins!" she cried to the French lawyer. "Don't you know that? Now go tell them how these Americans are killing our children. You're going to tell them, aren't you?"<sup>1</sup>

Halimi visited Vietnam for the sole purpose of determining if the Americans truly were "assassins" in Vietnam. She had traveled to the country as part of an investigatory team for the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, an international group of intellectuals intent on determining if U.S. actions in Vietnam constituted war crimes. The group, gathered by aging British philosopher Bertrand Russell in 1966, worked throughout 1967 to collect evidence of American war methods and any resulting atrocities. Meeting in Stockholm in the spring and Copenhagen in the fall of 1967, the

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<sup>1</sup> Gisèle Halimi, "Pour le 'Tribunal' Russell: Un nouvel témoignage sur les bombardements du nord," *Le Monde*, May 4, 1967.

group acted as judges, listening to a multitude of scientific presentations, witness testimony, and intellectual analysis before "trying" the U.S. as war criminals under guidelines derived from both the post-war Nuremburg trials and the later Geneva Convention. In the end, the "Tribunal" found the U.S. guilty of, among other things, intentional genocide.<sup>2</sup>

The Tribunal had little effect on the international situation. Although one of their scientific reports forced the U.S. to admit to using cluster bombs near civilian areas, the "judgment" in no way altered American intentions nor really affected international opinion on the war. Yet the Tribunal was a sincere effort, a period of, as French writer Simone de Beauvoir remembered, "total mobilization."<sup>3</sup> While the Tribunal was ineffective as an international body of law, it holds value as a case study of the changing dynamics of the French anti-war protests. In this chapter, I examine the experiences and rhetoric of French members of the Tribunal, focusing in particular on their conceptions of

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<sup>2</sup> The Russell Tribunal met twice in 1967 and, through examination of copious amounts of evidence, "convicted" the United States - in absentia - of several war crimes: aggression according to international law, experimentation with weapons prohibited by international law, attacks which deliberately targeted civilians, P.O.W. abuse, and, most significantly, genocide. Jean-Paul Sartre and Vladimir Dedjier acted as Tribunal Presidents, while the jury was made up of intellectuals/activists from various countries: for France, Simone de Beauvoir and Laurent Schwartz; for Italy, Lelio Basso; for Mexico, Lazaro Cardenas; for the United States, David Dellinger and Stokely Carmichael (the latter later removed for missing too many sessions); for Cuba, Melba Hernandez; and for Sweden, Peter Weiss. Its results were published as *Against the crime of silence : proceedings of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal, Stockholm, Copenhagen*, ed. John Duffett (New York: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 1968). For more information, see Arthur Jay and Judith Klinghoffer, *International Citizens' Tribunals: Mobilizing Public Opinion to Advance Human Rights* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Bruno Bagnato, "Les États-Unis mis en accusation. Le Tribunal Russell et la Commission d'enquête sur les crimes américains au Vietnam," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973*, eds. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse (Brussels: Bruyant, 2003): 223-239; Christelle Gautran, "Le 'Tribunal' Russell: Tribunal international des crimes de guerre américains au Vietnam," and my own master's thesis, "Trials and Tribulations: French Intellectuals and the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, 1966-1967" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003). Bernard Brillant briefly discusses French intellectuals and the Tribunal in *Les Clercs de '68* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), while Nicolas Pas discusses how members of the Comité Vietnam National combined their committee work and their Tribunal work in his mémoire, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche française sur la guerre du Vietnam 1965-1968," esp. 189-196.

<sup>3</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout Compte Fait*, 480-81.

protest activity, their conflict with de Gaulle, their presentation of French history, and their interactions with different protest groups. Through this, I demonstrate that participation in the Tribunal and the resulting debate between French activists and political figures made the Tribunal a way not only of condemning U.S. activity in southeast Asia but also of discussing France and France's role in the world. As the members of the Russell Tribunal attempted to tell the world about the experience of a Vietnamese peasant woman and the actions of the United States, they also told much about their aims for and beliefs in France.

### **Moving Beyond "The Domain of Passion:" Creating a Tribunal and a New Form of Protest**

In April 1966, English philosopher, mathematician and pacifist Bertrand Russell contacted Jean-Paul Sartre about the possibility of forming a tribunal to investigate American war crimes in Vietnam. "My secretary, Ralph Schoenmann, has recently been to North Vietnam obtaining evidence regarding U.S. bombardment of hospitals, schools, sanatoria and leprosia," Russell wrote to "dear Professor Sartre." "It is overwhelmingly clear that the U.S. is engaged in a sustained series of war crimes against the people of Vietnam. I am anxious that there should be a highly representative and respected international Tribunal to hear the full evidence concerning the U.S. war crimes."<sup>4</sup> Russell's inspiration for a Tribunal came from the experiences of American David Mitchell, who had been put on trial in 1965 for resisting the draft. Russell's group, the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, had provided support for Mitchell's defense, and Schoenmann's travelled to Vietnam in order to collect evidentiary support that the U.S.

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<sup>4</sup> Bertrand Russell to Jean-Paul Sartre, Plas Penrhyn, 19 April 1966, *Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 587-88.



was in fact committing war crimes and Mitchell was therefore justified in refusing to serve.<sup>5</sup> While the data Schoenmann found was not admitted in court, the publicity gained from the Mitchell trial motivated Russell to attempt a larger study of American war crimes, in the form of an International Tribunal which would function in a way similar to the Nuremberg Tribunals of post World War II.<sup>6</sup> He hoped by this tribunal to establish legal precedent which conscientious objectors could use as reason to avoid military duty.<sup>7</sup>

For Jean-Paul Sartre, the letter and Ralph Schoenmann's 1966 visit to discuss participation with himself and Simone de Beauvoir offered a chance to expand anti-war protests beyond their typical form in France. Sartre was a logical choice for inclusion in the Tribunal. During the Algerian War, he had been one of the principal signatories of the "Manifesto of the 121," a 1960 document which proclaimed the right of French men to refuse to serve the French army in Algeria. By 1966, he had already made an overt stance against the Vietnam War by refusing to travel to the United States, and was moving to the forefront of the French anti-war movement with the fall 1966 formation of the Comité Vietnam National. Beauvoir had similarly been involved in Algerian War and Vietnam War protests. Although hesitant about the time commitment the Tribunal would require, Beauvoir and Sartre were convinced to join by Schoenmann's assurance they would only definitively needed for "two or three days for the final decisions," and by the urgings of

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Griffin and Alison Roberts Miculan, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell: The Public Years, 1914-1970* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 585. Mitchell was convicted and required to serve time in prison. He remained (and remains) active in draft resistance movements; see his contribution to *Historians Against the War*: <http://www.historiansagainstawar.org/resources/wontgo.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 586.

<sup>7</sup> Klinghoffer, *International Citizens' Tribunal*, 109; Nicholas Griffin and Alison Robert Miculan, *The Selected Letters*, 585. In a letter on the Mitchell trial to Prime Minister Dong, Russell states that he "considers [Schoenmann's research] an opportunity to frustrate the U.S. Government's war plans" by providing recruits a reason to opt out of conscription. Russell to Prime Minister Dong, Plas Penrhyn, 25 January 1966, *Selected Letters*, 586.

their longtime friend "Tito" Gerassi, who was active in anti-war protests in the States.<sup>8</sup> As the summer went on, Russell gathered other prominent intellectuals to his cause, ranging from the old and established such as Vladimir Dedjier (known for his biography of Tito), to the young and radical, such as Stokely Carmichael (then chairman of SNCC), and Sartre and Beauvoir soon became involved well beyond their original two or three day commitment.<sup>9</sup> With its wide range of participants from multiple countries, involvement in the Tribunal offered the French contingent the possibility of reaching a larger audience through an international forum.

The Tribunal formally announced its existence in August, and intensive planning began that fall.<sup>10</sup> Before sitting judgment the following spring, the Tribunal sent a number of experts to Vietnam to conduct research and gather evidence of any war crimes. They intended to analyze carefully these groups' discoveries during the trial, in addition to evaluating witness testimonies from the Vietnamese, dissident American soldiers, and international scientific experts. Working from the basis of the set-up of the Nuremburg trials and the regulations on war crimes laid out by the Geneva Convention, they employed a number of international law specialists in an attempt to make the Tribunal into a legitimate war-crimes court. Sartre considered the group to be a citizens' tribunal, a group that "had been created to allow the citizen to participate in justice."<sup>11</sup> Only governments or the people could organize a tribunal, Sartre explained, but governments

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<sup>8</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout Compte Fait*, 464.

<sup>9</sup> Carmichael would send Courtney Cox in his place to the first session. Julius Lester of SNCC also attended the first session, although not as a member of the "jury."

<sup>10</sup> "Lord Russell organise un 'tribunal' pour les 'crimes de guerre' au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 4 August 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Sartre à de Gaulle," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 26, 1967.

would not do so because they feared being judged themselves and the people tended only to act only in revolutionary times. Intellectuals had therefore designated themselves as the Tribunal because "no one had done so."<sup>12</sup> Their goal was not to allocate legal power to themselves but to spread knowledge with a legal basis to the masses, thereby allowing the masses to take the necessary revolutionary action. The intellectuals constructed the tribunal in a way that bypassed the state's authority, but used laws that states claimed to support. It was extra-legal international legality.

For the French intellectuals participating, the legal format of the Russell Tribunal meant that this action exceeded the limits of normal anti-war protests, particularly by expanding the intellectual's role. Sartre remained aware that the Tribunal's chosen format and its lack of actual power had caused some to condemn it as a "kangaroo court."<sup>13</sup> However, he felt that the chosen set-up provided the necessary push that intellectuals' protest movements needed. "Any judgment which is not executionary is obviously derisory," Sartre noted. "I can't really see myself condemning President Johnson to death."<sup>14</sup> No one in the Tribunal pretended to have any executionary power, however. Their goal was rather to "give a juridical dimension to acts of international politics, in order to combat the tendency of the majority of people to only pronounce practical or moral judgments on the behavior of a social group or a government."<sup>15</sup> Moving from the moral to the legal level marked an important transition in protest activity. "When we yell in a meeting 'The Vietnam War is a crime!' we're in the domain of passion," Sartre

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 32.

remarked. By moving from a rendez-vous of protesters to a tribunal using an international legal base, the members of the Tribunal intended to change the force of protesters' words. More than a simple appeal to the emotions of the general public, the Tribunal's judgment would be a legally constituted fact, a plea resting on empirical evidence and extending therefore beyond the moral plane.

Sartre additionally intended to use the Tribunal as a means of pushing beyond simple condemnation of this particular war, to a challenge to the entire imperialist system. He saw the struggle of third world nations as "nothing more than the transposition, on the international plan, of the class struggle." As such, a regular condemnation would have no effect; but the intellectual and protestor, by demonstrating how the imperialist mechanism worked (and, within the Tribunal, how it violated international law) could manage to combat it; governments could restrain it through politics, or an armed fight could overcome it.<sup>16</sup> In any case, America needed to be made aware that it was not the center of the world, not the hegemonic power it conceived itself to be.

Yet French protests faced an additional obstacle in attempting to put the U.S. back in its place: the members on the Tribunal found that their views of American action in Vietnam did not differ much from the views of the French government. For Sartre, however, the Tribunal's set-up gave protesters the chance to surpass de Gaulle's rhetoric and challenge him as well. This was first of all because Sartre did not believe de Gaulle's stances against the war were sincerely intended to restrain American action, but rather to make de Gaulle look powerful in the eyes of the world. Sartre would not concede that de

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 28.

Gaulle was an anti-imperialist.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Sartre considered the intellectuals' intervention important because they were not simply calling for peace; they were condemning imperialist actions and supporting colonial movements that were leading towards the socialist revolution that apparently could no longer take place within Europe. The call to the masses that the Tribunal was launching was therefore not just a reiteration of the Gaullist condemnation of American aggression, but an attempt to "wake up" the petit-bourgeois masses, and convince them, "by legalism," that a union with the working class was desirable.<sup>18</sup>

Deriders of the Tribunal questioned whether the attempted juxtaposition of intellectual/protestor/jurist held any validity. French President Charles de Gaulle, who refused to allow the Tribunal to meet in France, sharply reminded Sartre that "all justice, in its principle as well as in its execution, belongs only to the State."<sup>19</sup> In a letter to the editor of *Le Monde*, a Frenchman complained that he couldn't tolerate the idea that "individuals would give themselves the right to judge, and, in contempt of all laws, improvise being justices, therefore participating in their own way to the disorganization of an already messed-up world."<sup>20</sup> Conservative columnist Thierry Maulnier bemoaned "the well-known taste of leftist intellectuals to have a certain majesty of proceedings, which makes them change their opinions into verdicts, and dress up, at least ideally, in the toga and the robe, which makes them look serious." He accused the group of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>19</sup> Charles de Gaulle to Jean-Paul Sartre, April 19, 1967, in *Situations*, VII, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Gérard Prévot, letter, in "Correspondance: A propos de deux jugements sur l'action des Etats-Unis au Vietnam," *Le Monde*, Dec. 1, 1966.

attempting to manipulate psychologically the public by calling itself a "Tribunal," since it gave their judgment a universal appearance. He charged that they deliberately embraced the ambivalent in order to confuse and to disseminate their propaganda more effectively.<sup>21</sup>

Whether they looked better in judicial robes or intellectual garb remained unclear, but it was certain that the French members of the tribunal had a difficult time keeping their positions as prosecution witnesses and trial jurors separate. After the first expeditionary group returned from its evidence-gathering trip to Vietnam, the French contingent held a press conference to discuss its findings. French lawyer Léon Matarasso declared that a detailed investigation from the group had determined that "the Americans in Vietnam were undertaking an intensive and systematic bombing of the civilian population."<sup>22</sup> Former French Army weapons inspector Jean-Pierre Vigier displayed cluster bombs the Tribunal had collected, explaining how the fragmentation system worked to destroy humans, rather than military installations. Sartre and Schwartz, jury members, stood and listened as the evidence was presented and Matarasso and Vigier publicly declared their belief that the U.S. was committing war crimes in Vietnam.

Holding a press conference and releasing the evidence months before the Tribunals' actual session seemed to be in violation of its determination to decide on the U.S.' guilt based on an in-court legal evaluation. Sartre and Schwartz were far from innocent bystanders; they had organized the conference. Sartre even provided Vigier with space in Sartre's review, *Les Temps Modernes*, to reiterate his findings in printed form.

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<sup>21</sup> Thierry Maulnier, "Violence et Conscience: un tribunal de combat," *Le Figaro*, May 2, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> "A Paris: la première commission d'enquête du 'tribunal international' présente son rapport", *Le Monde*, Feb. 4, 1967, 2.

But if the goal of the Tribunal was, as Russell had said, to "prevent the crime of silence," then the information that its investigative teams gathered needed to be distributed as early and as often as possible. Information that might help prevent further damage within Vietnam could not be confined to the court room; rather, the court room was to be the setting which transposed this speech onto another level of presentations, the legal level. Although the verdict appeared to be decided in advance, the judicial process would give the work its final seal, while additionally justifying the expanded role of the engaged intellectual and anti-war protestor. As a brochure by the "French Friends of the Russell Tribunal" explained, the Tribunal would use all arms at its disposal to help in the fight against imperialism. "The celebrity of its members, the rigour of its investigation methods mean that its decisions will have a large international reach," the "Friends" noted. "These decisions can facilitate rising consciousness in the western world; they can -- and this is without doubt the most important aspect -- reach large groups of American citizens, thus helping the movements which, in difficult situations, have undertaken the struggle against the war on American soil itself."<sup>23</sup> Legality and science would provide extra oomph to celebrity and spectacle which, the Tribunal hoped, would change the protest into a powerful international statement and motivator.

### **The Problem of "A Dozen Silly Intellectuals:" Conflict Between the Tribunal and De Gaulle**

Before the Tribunal could deploy its protest arsenal, however, it ran into unexpected trouble over its planned location. Originally, the group intended to "try" the United States from Paris. But on October 8, 1966, *Le Monde* published an article

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<sup>23</sup> Tribunal International contre les crimes de Guerre au Vietnam, "Crimes de Guerre au Vietnam", section "Participez à l'action des amis français de la fondation Russell" CAC 20000529 art 2.

asserting that Bertrand Russell had received a "discreet warning" from the French government that his initiative would not be welcome within the hexagon. "According to the interior minister," *Le Monde* claimed, "the French government allegedly let the British philosopher know that his project was 'unthinkable,' that a celebrity could not in any case be a substitute for justice, and that in consequence 'judging' President Johnson in France was not a possibility." The government had apparently made it clear that while they would not stop Russell from entering the country, they could not guarantee visas for his companions.<sup>24</sup> The "French Friends of the Russell Foundation" quickly shot back a denial. "Convinced that the French government would not consider bending to the pressures the United States government is putting on it in this issue as in many others, the French Friends of the Russell Foundation declare that the Russell Foundation's projects remained unchanged," they wrote.<sup>25</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Russell Foundation itself issued a statement that any pressure to change venues was "entirely false."<sup>26</sup> Yet behind-the-scenes negotiations demonstrated that the French government would in fact "bend to pressures" from the United States. The ongoing discussions between the United States and France over the Tribunal, and the resultant public conflict between Sartre and de Gaulle once de Gaulle banned the Tribunal from meeting in France, demonstrated the power of the State while additionally opening a new avenue for French protestors to challenge de Gaulle.

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<sup>24</sup> "Le Président Johnson ne sera pas 'jugé' à Paris," 8 October 1966.

<sup>25</sup> "A propos de l'initiative de Bertrand Russell," 11 October 1966.

<sup>26</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 29 October 1966.



From a very early date, the American Embassy pushed the French Foreign Affairs Ministry to block the Tribunal's scheduled meetings. On August 5, Etienne Ma'anach, director of the Asian sector of the French Foreign Affairs Ministry, inquired about what legal means existed to refuse permission to the Russell Foundation.<sup>27</sup> He found a variety of possibilities available: a law from 1881 prohibiting Frenchmen from insulting foreign heads of State; administrative power which could prohibit the tribunal based on "public order;" the possibility of a lawsuit for "defamation;" and even the charge of "interfering with public services," for which the recipient could receive jail time.<sup>28</sup> By August 19th, Ma'anach's group moved to keep the Tribunal from appearing. In a note explaining his reasoning, Ma'anach specifically invoked the danger the Tribunal could do to France's role in the world, stating "we have the greatest interest in keeping intact a position of perfect objectivity... in view of preserving, in our country, the chances we have of contributing to the pacification of Indochina." It was in France's best interest, given the possibility of a negotiation, to "keep its credit available to be able to act efficiently with all interested parties." This would not be possible, he explained, "if America ended up believing that French authorities let [American] leaders be 'put on trial' on [French] territory at a moment where, up against serious difficulties, [Americans] are particularly sensible to foreign reactions."<sup>29</sup> Opting not to pursue any of the legal options as of yet, the Foreign Affairs Ministry quietly informed the North Vietnamese in late August that no visas would be granted to any potential Tribunal participants.<sup>30</sup> By November, they

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<sup>27</sup> Gautran, "Tribunal," 59.

<sup>28</sup> Journoud, 1119-1120.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Gautran, "Tribunal," 60.

<sup>30</sup> Journoud, 1120.

had told the American Embassy the Tribunal would not take place in France. Ralph Schoenmann, visiting Paris for preparations, found himself detained at Orly for 24 hours, an act which a ministry employee described as a "friendship gesture" to the United States. In March 1967, the French Foreign Ministry communicated their refusal to Bertrand Russell; as they told North Vietnamese representative Mai Van Bo the same month, they would not be allowing this "parody of justice" to occur in France.<sup>31</sup> But it would take until late April 1967 for the Ministry negotiations to burst upon the public scene, when de Gaulle wrote to Sartre to refuse to allow the Tribunal to meet in Paris.

Sartre, suspecting something amiss when Tribunal member Vladimir Dedjier was denied a travel visa, promptly challenged de Gaulle to explain himself. "I want to believe, *monsieur le président de la République*, that our fears are in vain and that we are not learning about government decisions in an indirect manner, through the actions of embassies or consular services," Sartre wrote. Implicit in Sartre's hope that it was all a "misunderstanding" was the accusation that de Gaulle had caved to foreign pressures and was betraying his own stance against the war. Pushing de Gaulle to prove himself by issuing all other visas without difficulty, Sartre ended his letter by signing himself "Jean-Paul Sartre, president of the Russell Tribunal."<sup>32</sup>

De Gaulle promptly took up the challenge to his authority and responded to Sartre's implied questioning of his policies in a letter he addressed not to the president of the Russell Tribunal, but to "*mon cher maître*," a term reserved more for those in the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 1121-1122.

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre to Charles de Gaulle, 13 April 1967, in *Situations*, VIII, 43.

education profession than in the business of organizing international legal bodies.<sup>33</sup> His first move was to shoot down any insinuation that he feared criticism of American leaders on French soil. "Independent of the fact that writing and speech are free in our country," he reminded Sartre, "there would be no reason to keep out private individuals whose ideas, what's more, are, on this topic, akin to the official position of the French Republic."<sup>34</sup> Clearly therefore visa rejections were not due to Gaullist ideological differences with the Tribunal's positions. Yet de Gaulle sharply admonished Sartre that even if the Tribunal's views were acceptable, the government had to be on its guard: It would not be appropriate, de Gaulle noted, for France to allow a country that was its "traditional friend" to be subject to such a "proceeding exorbitant in both law and international customs."<sup>35</sup> This underlined de Gaulle's position that French criticism of the United States did not mean a total split between the two countries and emphasized that the government was working with its own history of French-U.S. relations which trumped Sartre's concerns about imperialism. The comment additionally placed a clear divide between the rules governing interactions between governments, and the actions allowed to protest groups. De Gaulle intended to maintain diplomatic relations with the United States, and to reserve the sphere of legal judgments for the government alone.

"I don't have to remind you," de Gaulle chastised to Sartre, "that all justice, in its principle as well as its execution, belongs only to the State." Since the State was the only recognized legal entity allowed to participate in international relations, de Gaulle

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<sup>33</sup> Charles de Gaulle to Jean-Paul Sartre, 19 April 1967, in *Situations*, VIII, 43. "Maître" is also used to address lawyers, but that is clearly not de Gaulle's intent here.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

explained that it was impossible for the French government to allow the Tribunal to meet on French territory. He suggested in his conclusion that the intellectuals involved drop their juridoc-political pretenses and return to their normal domain, since "certain people gathered around Lord Russell could have a moral credit, while lacking a public office[.]" It did not make sense, de Gaulle argued, that they felt they would make more of an impact by "putting on a toga [judicial robe] borrowed for the occasion."<sup>36</sup> The President signed his letter with a traditional French politeness formula: "Please accept, my dear teacher [*mon cher maître*], the assurances of my distinguished consideration."

Sartre was well aware that de Gaulle's letter was intended to remind him of what role he was supposed to have within society. "I'm only *maître* to café waiters who know that I write," he sneered in his response interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur*.<sup>37</sup> De Gaulle's appellation was, in Sartre's view, an attempt to ignore Sartre's role as Tribunal president and reduce him to a simple intellectual. Yet for Sartre, the intellectuals' role in the Tribunal was essential, as he saw these intellectuals as representing the masses' right to participate in judiciary affairs. The jury the Tribunal constituted was one that should have existed somewhere, but did not, because governments feared the judgments such a jury might produce. Intellectuals had therefore designated themselves as a Tribunal because "no one had done so."<sup>38</sup> The intellectuals involved in the Tribunal were no more than an important cog in the machine of knowledge distribution; they were the site of praxis. By choosing to focus on them, the cog, as de Gaulle's insistence on calling Sartre

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>37</sup> Jean Paul-Sartre, "Sartre à de Gaulle" in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 26, 1967. Reprinted in Jean-Paul Sartre. *Situations VII: Autour de '68*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

"maître" indicated, the government was undermining the intellectuals' attempt to merge with a larger cause and by extension suppressing political speech.

Sartre used de Gaulle's refusal of the Tribunal as a means of challenging the legitimacy of de Gaulle's government. He argued that de Gaulle feared that the revolutionary potential the Tribunal could unleash would harm his power, and accused de Gaulle of offering platitudes against the war rather than any real action. As Sartre stated, "a country is not limited to its government. The attitude [of de Gaulle's government] that consists in blaming via speeches and measured words the policy of the United States, all the while forbidding the masses to directly demonstrate their opposition to the Vietnam War, is completely anti-democratic."<sup>39</sup> By limiting the intellectuals to "moral credit," de Gaulle was endeavoring to fit their comments into the "speeches and measured words" his government allowed. Sartre wanted to extend beyond any formulaic condemnation of the U.S. to a more spectacular protest that would offer the masses the chance to truly speak -- and perhaps act -- out.

Like many commentators in the newspapers, Sartre thought that de Gaulle was scared, and as he remarked to his interviewer, de Gaulle "definitely wasn't afraid of Bertrand Russell, who's 94, or of myself, who's 62, or of our friends. If we were simply a dozen silly intellectuals who were pretending to be judges, they'd let us be. Why are they scared of us?" he queried. "Because we pose a problem that no western government wants posed: that of war crimes, which once again all [governments] want to reserve for themselves the power to commit."<sup>40</sup> If the group of intellectuals formed a citizens' tribunal, they claimed a right to morality, legality, and politics in a way that governments

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 57.

wanted to reserve only to themselves. De Gaulle was not willing to let intellectuals take that step.

In their reactions to the conflict, the French press underlined the challenge to traditional protest methods and intellectual actions that the Tribunal posed, and analyzed the reasons for de Gaulle's firm stance. *L'Express* reprinted Sartre's comment about "a dozen silly intellectuals" and noted that "even if de Gaulle ignores sillies, he's still wary about intellectuals."<sup>41</sup> As *Le Monde* remarked, this wariness towards intellectuals seemed to be directly related to the General's uncomfortableness with the "toga" they intended to wear. The paper invoked de Gaulle's previous attitude towards intellectuals in the Algerian War, when, despite Sartre's frequent proclamations that he had signed the "Manifesto of the 121," he was not arrested when other signatories were, in part because of de Gaulle's intervention. *Le Monde* reminded its readers that de Gaulle was supposed to have chided over-eager security ministers by saying "Let the intellectuals do what they want!"<sup>42</sup> It was the intellectuals' attempt to overcome their particular position and adapt an international legal basis, giving themselves a universal standing in the courts of justice, however, that made the President of the Republic so eager to lock the intellectual into his traditional place.

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<sup>41</sup> "Le Général et le particulier," *L'Express* 1-7 May 1967.

<sup>42</sup> "L'interdiction du 'Tribunal Russell' en France: 'Toute justice, dans son principe comme dans son exécution n'appartient qu'à l'Etat,' écrit le général de Gaulle à M. Jean-Paul Sartre," *Le Monde* 25 April 1967.

**"It's the Same Thing in Vietnam:"  
Comparing the French Colonialist Past and the American Imperialist Present**

Sartre's conceptualization of France in the world, based as it was on a revolutionary ideal, conflicted far too drastically with de Gaulle's own certain idea of France for the Tribunal to be permitted to take place on French soil. The Tribunal was forced to move to Sweden for its first session. The exchange highlighted, however, that the true conflict extended beyond different understandings of France's present role in the world, to different understandings of France's actions in the past. In talking about the Vietnam War, French intellectuals frequently dug into France's colonial past, and specifically into the topic of wartime crimes committed by France during the Algerian struggle. While de Gaulle struggled to move past the divisions caused by the Algerian War, Sartre sought to keep them fresh in everyone's minds, arguing that they had not been studied enough.

For the French contingent, the Tribunal offered the possibility to once again to pass judgment on French imperialism. At a press conference in November 1966, historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet remarked that he found it a shame that such a Tribunal had not existed during the Algerian War.<sup>43</sup> Vidal-Naquet's comment implied that participants wished to correct a mistake intellectuals had made in the past by preparing a new form of legal and intellectual action in the near future. Sartre expanded on Vidal-Naquet's view in a November 30th article in *Le Nouvel Observateur* entitled simply "Crime."<sup>44</sup> The Tribunal differed from typical intellectual criticism, he explained, because of its interest

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<sup>43</sup> "Le 'tribunal contre les crimes de guerre commis au Vietnam' siégera en mars prochain à Paris," *Le Monde* 24 November 1955. Vidal-Naquet's exact role in the Tribunal is unclear, but as previously mentioned, he was a central member of the CVN.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le Crime," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 30 November 1966. Reprinted in Sartre, *Situations, VIII*, 27-41.

in seeing if U.S. acts could be qualified as "criminal." Such a move could not be implemented against the current French government policy, but it could have been during the Algerian war, when "the torture, the regroupment camps, the reprisals against civilian populations, the executions without judgments were similar to certain crimes condemned at Nuremberg."<sup>45</sup> Sartre stated that had a war crimes tribunal been constituted then, he would have agreed to take part in it; and just because such a Tribunal had not passed judgment then, was no reason not to do so against the United States. Through their comments, Sartre and Vidal-Naquet equated French actions in Algeria with Nazi war crimes, a damning comparison, while also arguing that intellectuals could become more powerful in their protests by supplementing their moral judgments with legal means.

Reproached during his interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* with the fact that the Tribunal was not also trying North Vietnam on war crimes, Sartre reacted by invoking the precedents he had set for himself during the Algerian War. "I refuse to put on the same level the actions of a group of poor, beaten peasants, who are forced to have an iron discipline among their ranks, and the actions of an immense army supported by an over-industrialized country of 200 million inhabitants," he explained angrily. Vietnam had not invaded America; therefore they were not the aggressors here. "During the Algerian war," Sartre reminded his interviewer, "I always refused to compare terrorism by bombs, which was the only arm available to the Algerians, and the actions and exactions of a rich army of 500,000 men occupying the entire country. It's the same thing in Vietnam."<sup>46</sup> In linking his reactions to the Algerian War to his stance on the Vietnam

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 34-5.



War, Sartre linked French imperialism to American imperialism, creating a continuity and symmetry between the two.

References to Algeria additionally allowed Tribunal members to put forth a version of French society that had intellectuals at the center as moral and political arbiters. All of the prominent intellectuals involved had been deeply involved in protests against the Algerian War. Sartre, Beauvoir and Schwartz had signed the "Manifesto of the 121;" for their pains, Sartre had his apartment bombed several times and Schwartz lost his position in the French university. Gisèle Halimi had written a book with Simone de Beauvoir exposing the brutal rape and torture of an Algerian woman, Djamila Bouchpa, by French soldiers. The intellectuals had been at the head of the social protest movement which helped in part to lead to the removal of France from Algeria. They hoped to recreate that situation within France as they protested the Vietnam war, usurping de Gaulle's place as political mediator and shifting the internal power dynamics to better allow engaged intellectuals space to work. In their view, French society necessarily involved active intellectuals.

In his closing remarks, after the Tribunal had decided to convict the United States, Sartre presented a long exposé on genocide to justify the Tribunal's decision which both invoked French history and underscored the contemporary French connections to the Vietnam War. In a move that once again tied the Vietnamese situation to the French past, Sartre focused a large part of his analysis on the experience of French colonization in Algeria. Describing the systematic destruction of Algeria's economic infrastructure by the French occupation, he claimed that "colonization is not a matter of mere conquest as was the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine; it is by its very nature an act of cultural

genocide."<sup>47</sup> But the French, Sartre, explained, could not proceed to a physical genocide in Algeria because they were too economically invested in the country. The genocidal tendencies which marked colonialism were checked by monetary needs. The United States, on the other hand, had no economic attachment to Vietnam. Sartre made it clear that the U.S. had not fully committed genocide yet, but stated that its actions reflected an attempt to do. He argued that because of the close ties of the modern world, all were touched by the Vietnam War. In addition to the guilty verdict, two messages were clear: the French government had the capacity if not the will for genocide, and the French people needed to speak out. As intellectuals had led the way against the French regime in the past, so would they challenge the American regime today.

### **The Problem with "Men of Commitment:" The Russell Tribunal in the French Anti-War Movement**

Throughout their work, Tribunal members had endeavored to tie their efforts into the on-going French anti-war protest movement. In its call for help with the Tribunal, the French Friends of the Russell Tribunal emphasized that while those looking to participate could provide financial aid to offset costs, the main work needed were "above all political tasks." "In the coming weeks," they explained, "all those who realize that the Vietnam War is the key to the international system must become militants, propagandists of the International Tribunal." Partisans needed to "explain the reasons for its formation, make its objectives known, spread the results of its inquiries and its deliberations: in short, create a climate of opinion such that the Tribunal can not become a victim of a boycott by silence." They emphasized the importance each supporter could have and the changed

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<sup>47</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "On Genocide," 615. There is no mention of the effects of the French colonization of Indochina.

exuberance they hoped the Tribunal would bring, stating "Each one of us is on his own a means of fighting against aggression in Vietnam, by preparing new battles at an even higher level."<sup>48</sup>

The Tribunal members' main connection to the French protest movement came through the Comité Vietnam National, founded by Sartre, Schwartz and Vidal-Naquet. From its creation, the CVN announced that it would be supporting the Tribunal's efforts as part of its ongoing anti-war activity.<sup>49</sup> In a recruiting pamphlet, it offered participants who believed that "[the Vietnamese's] fight concerned all people of the world's right of liberty" the chance to "support Vietnam with all [their] might" by, among other options, "support[ing] the action of the International Tribunal Against War Crimes and [being kept] informed about its activities."<sup>50</sup> The CVN also organized a meeting to allow Tribunal researchers the opportunity to present their finds, as well as joining with the Tribunal and other groups to support an art show, "Art for Peace," to raise money for the Vietnamese people.<sup>51</sup> *Pour le Vietnam*, the CVN's newspaper, put out a special issue in early 1967 dedicated to the Tribunal. Called "A Tribunal To What Ends?" [*Un tribunal pour quoi faire?*], the issue offered readers the chance to learn about the Tribunal's findings, read special reports on attacks on dikes and leper colonies by experts, and view photos of alleged war crimes which Sartre hoped would force militants to become more

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<sup>48</sup> Tribunal International contre les crimes de Guerre au Vietnam, "Crimes de Guerre au Vietnam", section "Participez à l'action des amis français de la fondation Russell," CAC 20000529 art 2.

<sup>49</sup> "Un 'Comité Vietnam National' appelle à l'unité des organisations qui manifestent contre la guerre," *Le Monde* 28 Octobre 1966.

<sup>50</sup> CVN pamphlet "Adhésions," no date, CAC 20000529 art 2

<sup>51</sup> "A la Mutualité, des témoignages sur la guerre au nord," *Le Monde* 22 February 1967; "L'art pour la paix" *Le Monde* 21 June 1967.

active and "choose" liberty via protesting the war. In the issue's editorial, the newspapers' staff underlined their belief in the importance of the Russell Tribunal to motivating and propelling French protest activities. "The moral condemnation of the Tribunal which is denouncing torture, 'illegal' arms, etc... could appear very idealistic," the paper admitted, "but if this condemnation finds an echo in large swaths of the population and marks itself as a step in the climb [*comme un étape*] towards more and more massive mobilization that will have an effect against the Americans, should we forbid it? The National Bureau thus calls upon the committees to guarantee that the special issue has a large diffusion and to place this action [for the Russell Tribunal] within a plan for greater activity [*relancement*] this year."<sup>52</sup>

Yet if the CVN worked willingly with the Tribunal and was joined in its efforts by CVN-connected groups such as the Paris American Committee to Stopwar and the Parti Socialiste Unifié, this did not mean the Tribunal was free from the in-fighting which wracked the protest efforts of the French left.<sup>53</sup> Unsurprisingly, there were conflicts with the French Communist Party. Forever concerned about being passed on the left, the PCF had been struggling to retain its early hegemony over Vietnam War protest movements. As French doctor and Tribunal researcher Jean Krivine noted, the PCF "viewed with a *mauvais oeil*" any actions which escaped its control.<sup>54</sup> The first session of the Tribunal

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<sup>52</sup> "Pour le Vietnam, numéro spécial concernant le Tribunal Russell," *Pour le Vietnam* October 1967. Original found in CHS Fonds Comité Vietnam National.

<sup>53</sup> The Paris American Committee to Stopwar (PACS) held two meetings, one on May 23 and one on December 15, 1967, to hear testimony from Tribunal participants Scholfield Corryell, Gisèle Halimi, and Jean Chesneaux. Flyers, undated, in CAC 20000529 art 7. The PSU reported favorably on Tribunal proceedings and sent a message of support to the Stockholm meeting. "Le Tribunal de Stockholm," *Tribune Socialiste* 18 May 1967.

<sup>54</sup> Krivine, "Avant-Propos," *Carnets*.

was completely ignored by the PCF, but, as part of its attempt to keep itself in the loop, it reversed course for the November meeting, giving ample coverage after a note from higher up came down on October 31, 1967: "Give a good summary of the Russell Tribunal meeting in *L'Humanité*."<sup>55</sup> Yet while conflict with the PCF existed, the main division brought to light by the tribunal was the growing gap between old guard intellectuals and their younger counterparts. Interestingly, the clearest example of the emerging split comes from the different accounts of the first session in Stockholm by Sartre and an American civil rights activist, Julius Lester.

Writing for *Le Nouvel Observateur* at the end of May 1967, Sartre recognized that while many media outlets had covered the trial, "all, however, passed by the essential: the drama that played out in Stockholm during little over a week, a drama that was not only lived by the Tribunal's members but by those who followed our debates, including American journalists." In Sartre's view, "the way in which we arrived at our conclusions [seemed] almost as important as the conclusions themselves." Evoking the behind-the-scenes debates in a play on the title of a famous film, he called his article "Twelve Unangry Men."<sup>56</sup>

Sartre described his time at the Stockholm hearings as a moment of transition from awareness to knowing. "Personally, I wasn't ready to say at the start that bombardments of civil populations were systematic and deliberate," he explained. "What was important to me was the passage from this vague idea, already insupportable: 'They're killing children, women, the elderly in Vietnam,' to this precise and odious idea:

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Lazar, "Parti Communiste," 244.

<sup>56</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Douze Hommes sans colère," in *Situations VIII*, 58.

'They're doing it on purpose.'"<sup>57</sup> By arriving at this judgment, and by having all of the Tribunal's members do so together, Sartre felt that the Tribunal was a success. "I said it before," he told the interviewer, "we would prove our existence as we went along. If the Tribunal succeeded, it was because it had the right to hold court; if it failed it was because it didn't have the right." In his view, the Tribunal had proved its right to exist.

As the interview underlined the Tribunal's legitimacy, it also attempted to make up for the lack of press coverage. Sartre's presentation for the reader of himself and the other intellectuals in the debating room, arriving at their decision, replicated the moment of *praxis*, the transition from passionate ideas to certain knowledge and then to judiciary action. "How could I know," he asked, "what had been going on, during these ten days, in the spirit of a non-violent activist and American pacifist like David Dellinger, in that of another American like Oglesby, in that of a Pakistani like Mahmud Ali Kasuri, of a Phillipino like Amado Hernandez, of an Englishman like Isaac Deutscher, or of the others who had seemed rather reserved to me at the start?" From the variety of the people involved, the personal experience was bound to differ widely. Yet the end judgment of each was the same, a unanimous guilty verdict. The individuality of the Tribunal jury members was thus secondary faced with the universal legitimacy of the information they were evaluating. Sartre's recounting justified the Tribunal's existence and made it into a valid and successful protest action.

Yet Sartre's presentation of the unanimity and joy of Tribunal members participating in the session contrasted sharply with the description of a young American involved, Julius Lester. Lester, a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 59.

Committee and a rising black nationalist, had been asked to Stockholm, as had Stokely Carmichael, to represent the activist view of African-Americans in the U.S. Sitting in on the Stockholm meeting in a non-jury position, he offered some scathing observations about the proceedings. Ignoring the warm feeling that Sartre evoked in his descriptions of the unanimous decision, he focused instead on the debate over how to announce the results, which he claimed was arranged when Sartre threatened to leave unless things were done his way. "Possibly," Lester observed, "he should have been allowed to."<sup>58</sup>

Lester's main concern centered on the way European intellectuals had chosen to fight the war in Vietnam. "Since World War II," Lester noted, "a mystique has grown up around 'acts of conscience' as if it were enough, in and of itself, to speak out in the face of injustice." While Lester admitted that avoiding "the crime of silence" was better than doing nothing at all, he felt that words alone could not change political reality. As he put it, "America is fighting for its own salvation, and you can publish a million photographs of napalmed babies and by the time you're finished, you'll have a million more to publish."<sup>59</sup> Lester felt that the older, European contingent in the Tribunal simply did not understand life in the Sixties and the moves necessary to make a revolution. Because of their insistence on words, the old guard of intellectuals had prevented real action. "I couldn't help but feel that Sartre was as much my enemy as L.B.J., " Lester wryly noted. "Both are men of commitment."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Julius Lester, "Judgment at Stockholm," in *Revolutionary Notes* (New York: Richard W. Baron, 1969), 18.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 14.

Lester's attitude reflected the widening divergence between the intellectuals who had lived through the second World War and those who were coming of age in the sixties. To this generation, change would come more from doing than through saying. Lester summed up the difference when he remarked, "Commitment is something that Sartre has written extensively on, and I presume that his involvement at Stockholm was an example of his commitment. If so, possibly what this age needs is not commitment but just caring about other people and being willing to die because you care so much."<sup>61</sup>

The tendency to move from words to action was also appearing in the French scene, most notably among the Maoist CVBs and the younger, Trotskyist members of the CVN. Although the youths often worked jointly with the CVN leadership in Vietnam protests, they favored street action over amphitheater protest. To the CVB, in particular, the intellectuals' initiatives were mired down in "spectacular actions without follow-up;" they searched more to reach directly to the masses, through continual propaganda and direct action.<sup>62</sup> They critiqued the CVN and the Tribunal for not getting down to the peoples' level, instead relying on the words of specialists and other well-known personalities.<sup>63</sup> Their desire for real action coexisted with a more violent approach to protests, typified by July 2, 1967: Teenagers enraged over the war smashed windows at the Thai embassy before spraypainting in blood red slogans such as "US=SS", "Support

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>62</sup> "Congrès des Comités Vietnam de Base: Texte préparatoire à la commission 'rapports avec les autres organisations' ", 5. Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, F delta 701/2.

<sup>63</sup> Comité Nanterre, "Sur le journal 'Vietnam' du Comité Vietnam National," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* November-December 1967. Interestingly, while the CVB repeatedly rejected the CVN's methods, including the Tribunal, it was not adverse to using the information they had unearthed: a report on the February 21, 1967 protests organized by the CVN noted that they allowed speeches "not by celebrities, but by militants" but then provided a list which included " Roger Pic de la comission de l'enquête du tribunal Bertrand Russell." The principle objections lay in form, not in content. UNEF, "Bulletin du 21 février," CAC 19870110 art 6.



Vietnam," "FLN will win," and "Stop sending Thailand troops to Vietnam." Two were arrested.<sup>64</sup> The CVN released a statement supporting the arrested youths, but the difference between the CVN's officially planned acts and the students' acts remained.<sup>65</sup> In his memoirs, Laurent Schwartz acknowledged the sharp differences. "According to the youth activists," he remembered, "simple protests, far from the American embassy, were of no interest; they were inefficient and "a bummer (tristounettes)." But Schwartz didn't see how else to act - as he put it, "In any case, we weren't going to [...] bomb around the American embassy!" Schwartz realized in retrospect that the different sentiments arose from a sense of frustration. The violence, he explained, "expressed a certain powerlessness when faced with a war of unheard of brutality."<sup>66</sup>

The French and American youth currents intersected during a CVN-sponsored "Che Guevara Week", which coincided with the Tribunal's second session. Stokely Carmichael, invited by the CVN leaders who knew him because of his connection to the Tribunal, spoke before a packed house at the Mutualité. Addressing Vietnam, Carmichael proclaimed, "We don't want peace in Vietnam. What we want is a Vietnamese victory over the U.S. In spilling our own blood to help this victory, we feel that we're not paying too high a price, even if we have to destroy the structures of the United States."<sup>67</sup>

According to the reporter, young people accounted for most of those present.

The full effect of the large split between the intellectual old guard and the up-and-coming youth would remain ungrasped for another five months. The Tribunal ended its

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<sup>64</sup> "A Paris (16e) des jeunes gens brisent des vitres de l'ambassade de Thaïlande," *Le Monde* 2-3 July 1967.

<sup>65</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 4 July 1967.

<sup>66</sup> Schwartz, *Un Mathématicien*, 440.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Amalric, "Le Pouvoir noir à la Mutualité," *Le Monde*, Dec, 8, 1967.

session convinced that by speaking out, it was doing its part. In Sartre's closing address, he underscored again the value of speaking out. "The Vietnamese fight for all men and the American forces against all," he claimed. "Neither figuratively nor abstractly. And not only because genocide would be a crime universally condemned by international law, but because little by little the whole human race is being subjected to this genocidal blackmail [....] This crime, carried out every day before the eyes of the world, renders all who do not denounce it accomplices of those who commit it, so that we are being degraded today for our future enslavement."<sup>68</sup> For their part, Tribunal members had no intention of being accomplices or preparing their enslavement. To a packed room in Roskilde, they announced their verdicts: guilty on all counts.<sup>69</sup> Applause burst out, and Tribunal members embraced.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the North Vietnamese government issued Russell Tribunal Commemorative Stamps, it would be difficult to deem the endeavor a success. Despite members' best efforts, press coverage remained limited, and transcripts and reports printed in 1968 had a low readership in France. Most significantly, the Tribunal had no strong impact on American public opinion.

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<sup>68</sup> Sartre, "On Genocide," in *Against the Crimes of Silence*, 626.

<sup>69</sup> The Tribunal voted yes unanimously on the following questions: "Is the government of Thailand guilty of complicity in the aggression committed by the United States government against Vietnam? Is the government of the Philippines guilty of complicity [...]? Has the United States government committed aggression against the people of Laos, according to the definition provided by international law? Have the armed forces of the United States used or experimented with weapons prohibited by the laws of war? Have prisoners of war captured by the armed forces of the United States been subjected to treatment prohibited by the laws of war? Is the United States guilty of genocide against the people of Vietnam?" It voted yes by an 8 to 3 margin on the question of Japan's complicity, with the three members who voted no arguing that while Japan had helped the U.S., it was not fully complicit. *Against the Crime of Silence*, 650-651.

<sup>70</sup> Beauvoir, *Tout Compte Fait*, 496.

Yet the Tribunal had a strong effect on the French intellectuals who had participated in it. They kept fond memories of their involvement. Beauvoir, for one, looked back on the period of international activism with nostalgia. Once back in France, group members continued to meet regularly at the house of Madeleine Garaudet, a communist activist. "Every two weeks, I think," Schwarz noted in his memoirs, "I met there Jean-Paul Sartre, Léo Matarasso, Marcel-Francis Kahn and his wife Réna Mireille Gansel, Roger Pic, and frequently Maria Jolas [an American expatriate]. An official Vietnam delegate also frequently came." The information the group received from the Vietnamese official allowed them to continue their fight against the war and for an FNL victory.

Participation in the Tribunal was also significant because it allowed the intellectuals to reconceptualize their role in terms of national and international powers. The loss of her colonies and the strengthening of the Cold War had moved France to a lesser position on the international playing field. By taking part in the Russell Tribunal, French intellectuals found themselves face to face with both their own country's status and with the question of how France should be involved in international affairs. They dealt with both questions by carefully linking the Tribunal's cause to the French past and by linking the Vietnamese struggle to a revolutionary future. Frequent mentions of Algeria and the French colonial struggle there made the Tribunal and the efforts of the FLN all the more accessible to French observers. Commentary also offered a clear link between a decidedly French past action (the struggle over the end of French Algeria) and a Tribunal geared towards events outside the country. Moreover, by constant reflection on the French past and by continued work through the CVN at home, Tribunal members

managed to weave the international effort into the national French intellectual community.

Part of the reason the Tribunal call resonated sprang obviously from the fact that a good percentage of the French population was already against the war. In particular, the strong stand that Charles de Gaulle had taken against American intervention made the intellectuals speaking out risk being nothing more than echoes. For a country where the intellectual had often taken a stand against the government's regime, the situation was unsettling. The Tribunal offered the possibility of recasting the struggle against the American presence in Vietnam in terms that allowed the intellectuals' calls to exceed those of the government. The form chosen for the Tribunal, moreover, permitted the intellectual to step out of their traditionally defined sphere of moral influence into that of political impact. That the move had strong ramifications could be seen from the severity of de Gaulle's replies to Sartre. Even if in the end many felt the Tribunal had still not earned its name, participation in the project allowed the intellectuals involved to combine moral, political and legal agents in a new and international fashion, attempting to create new protest forms for the anti-war movement.

De Gaulle's attack on Sartre, and the press' reaction to it as well as to Sartre's tiff with Dean Rusk, revealed one major problem with the Tribunal: there was no way for the protestors to truly overcome their celebrity and let the facts speak for themselves. It had been a delicate balancing act to begin with, since the people chosen to participate in the Tribunal were using their celebrity capital to garner attention to their movement. The desire, once attention had been focused on the Tribunal, to let the testimony speak and have the intellectuals merely as its vessels, was stymied by the continued interest in the

intellectuals themselves. Rather than becoming agents of praxis, they became objects of curiosity. Participants would have to learn how to best manipulate this interest in themselves, as they used their personal accounts and their talents as writers to better allow the average French reader to grasp the gravity of the Vietnamese situation.

The action of '68 seemed at first to pose a serious challenge to the concept of the engaged intellectual, working from the base of his or her celebrity to draw attention to a cause and bring others to act, that had underpinned the Tribunal's undertaking. Because the violent action of the May events seemed so much more revolutionary than the *praxis* method practiced by the traditional intellectual, the traditional intellectual seemed in danger of being replaced. Sartre himself drew upon the example of those who had used their knowledge to speak out against Vietnam as a way of defining the classic intellectual: they were old-fashioned precisely because they depended upon their established position within society in order to pass on their message.<sup>71</sup> New protestors, with their drastic actions, accepted that the society they hoped for would have no place for them: their violence was therefore aimed internally, towards themselves in society, as well as externally, towards society in general. They insisted on moving beyond talk.

French intellectuals in the Russell Tribunal may not have challenged their right to exist as such, as the intellectual would in the moments following May '68, but their participation in the Tribunal represented an attempt to adjust their protest methods to a changing world. Involvement in the Tribunal allowed the intellectual entry into different areas of politics and law, while reinforcing his purpose. It also gave the French protestors a chance to resituate themselves on an international level, while not sacrificing their French connections. The deep participation within this framework of commitment may

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<sup>71</sup> Sartre, "L'Ami du Peuple", in *Situations, VIII: Autour de 68*, 458.

have strengthened the cracks between generations that would become apparent when May '68 broke out. But the intellectuals, like the rest of the world, had no idea what was coming. Working from their understanding of the intellectual's social role and the value of protest, French members of the Tribunal did their best to avoid the crime of silence. Granting the wish of the Vietnamese mother who had begged Gisèle Halimi, they made sure to "tell them" all what was going on.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **"La France S'Ennuie"? Vietnam War Protests and the "Events" of February, March and April, 1968**

President Johnson hung precariously from St. Michel's neck. The straw-filled effigy of the American president had been placed inside the Latin Quarter fountain by protestors who had declared February 21, 1968 "Heroic Vietnam Day." Moments before, their procession had woven through the streets of the University District, chanting "Johnson, assassin!," "US = SS!" and "De Gaulle is complicit!," slapping handmade placards over the French street signs, rebaptizing locations with Vietnamese names to turn the Latin Quarter into the "Heroic Vietnam Quarter" for the evening. Earlier, activists had played a variation of tag with Parisian firemen, hanging the Vietcong flag from the Sorbonne rooftop, waiting for city officials to remove it, and then sneaking back out to replace it. Now, in a Latin Quarter plastered with Vietnamese symbols, they gathered in front of the fountain to listen to the demonstration's organizers speak. As the leaders congratulated the protesters on acts which they felt showed the power of the Vietnamese freedom fighters and the value of French involvement in the anti-war movement, they shouted that participants next needed to rename the American embassy in Paris. It was, they declared, "no longer the time for processions." An outstretched hand struck a light and, as the crowd let loose raucous cheers, President Johnson burst into flames.<sup>1</sup>

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Only a week before, journalist Pierre Viansson-Ponté wrote in *Le Monde* that, boisterous protests against the Vietnam War to the contrary, France was bored. The war "moved them," he claimed, but "did not really touch them," as was demonstrated by weak collection numbers for the recently launched "A Billion Francs for Vietnam" campaign. In any case, he remarked, "with the exception of a few activists on one side or the other, everyone, from the biggest to the smallest, sees the war with the same eyes." In a France "reduced to the Hexagon" and "at peace with the world," what happened in Vietnam was really "their business, not ours." None of the actions surrounding Vietnam had serious political repercussions domestically, Viansson-Ponté argued, and French politics were slipping into apathy. This, he noted, could prove extremely dangerous: bored Frenchmen had an annoying habit of amusing themselves by starting revolutions, to see if another government would be "more fun." If the country did not watch out, he warned, France in its current political state quite literally risked "dying of boredom."<sup>2</sup>

When May '68 burst upon an unsuspecting French public a few months later, Viansson-Ponté's words appeared almost prophetic. While historians have since revealed many of the numerous cracks under the façade of boredom and apathy that paved the way for the events of May '68, the role of French Vietnam War protests has not been fully appreciated. When examined at all, attention focuses primarily on the actions of the

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<sup>1</sup> "21 février," *Vietnam* 4 (March 1968): 8; "Manifestations en France et à l'étranger: Paris: Cortège au Quartier Latin et bagarres devant l'ambassade du Vietnam du Sud," *Le Monde* 23 February 1968; "Huit mille personnes ont manifesté à Paris contre l'action américaine au Vietnam," *Le Figaro* 22 February 1968; "Manifestation au quartier Latin," *L'Humanité* 22 February 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Viansson-Ponté, "Quand la France s'ennuie," *Le Monde* 15 February 1968. The "Campagne du Milliard" ["A Billion Francs for Vietnam"] was an inter-group effort launched in 1967 which encouraged each Frenchman to give the equivalent of a day's salary to help out the Vietnamese.



extreme left.<sup>3</sup> Vietnam War protests still appear as Viannson-Ponté described them: a diversion for fringe groups to pass the time until something more exciting and actually important happened.

Although there is some truth to Viansson-Ponté's portrayal of general French unity against the war -- an IFOP poll in February indicated that three out four French supported De Gaulle's foreign policy on Vietnam<sup>4</sup>-- the remainder who took issue with de Gaulle's foreign policy comprised an active, dedicated, and extremely vocal minority. This faction consisted of militants on both the left and the right who played a large role in shaping French political and social life in the months preceding May '68. To these groups, the battles in Vietnam concerned the whole of humanity, and not least of all the French.

These strong sentiments about the war translated into action. Between January 30th and April 30th, Vietnam activists held at least nineteen separate protests or large meetings of a thousand or more people in Paris alone -- an average of one major event every three days. Of these, right-wing groups organized four, as well as holding an art show in support of South Vietnam at the end of April. Collections for Vietnam also took place: although the campaign "A Billion Francs for Vietnam" did not reach its goal, the campaign "A Boat for Vietnam" handily collected 400 million ancien francs in monetary

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<sup>3</sup> The exceptions to this general rule are Kristin Ross' *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and Laurent Jalabert's "Aux Origines de la Génération 68," (*Vingtième Siècle* 55 [1997]) both of which note the importance of the Comités Vietnam de Base in forming activist students pre-May. Nicolas Pas develops this thesis in his dissertation, " Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche française sur la guerre du Vietnam 1965-1968."

<sup>4</sup> "Amérique: Pourquoi de Gaulle se tait," *L'Express* 871 (26 February - 3 March 1968): 4-7.

donations and goods.<sup>5</sup> While clashes between right- and left- wing groups around the Latin Quarter had broken out on a near-daily basis for some time, six fights related to Vietnam War protests during this time period were violent enough to merit newspaper coverage. Protest activity escalated to the point that three American businesses in Paris were attacked with plastic explosives.

French protests about the Vietnam War in early 1968, far from stemming from boredom, represented a sincere involvement of French citizens in the international arena. Moreover, their outcry was not significant merely as support for either the Vietcong or the American fighters. Protests and interactions concerning the Vietnam War created a political atmosphere which determined how some of the tensions at the start of May '68 exploded. In this chapter I will show how interactions on the French left during protests exacerbated the split between the Communist Party and gauchistes while also revealing a growing tendency among young militants for more violent, direct protests. Studying the protests also challenges the traditional narrative of the coming of May '68, which puts the right to the side, instead demonstrating that constant conflict between right and left in the months before May broke out laid the groundwork for the format of May protests. It also emphasizes how arguments over Vietnam reflected growing divisions in ideas about France's identity, which would explode in May. Although a full crisis did not develop until May 3, May 1968 had been rehearsed for months before. Only by understanding this and the way public activism about the Vietnam War developed in the spring of 1968 can we understand the particular form that May 1968 took.

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<sup>5</sup> "Un bateau pour le Vietnam: Plus de 400 millions (argents et dons en nature) collectés," *L'Humanité* 5 February 1968.

### **Everyone in the Same Boat: Attempts at Unified Protest on the Left**

As 1968 opened, major leftist groups opposing the war continued their efforts to present a unified front and work together, despite continual failure to reach unity in the past. Agreement on all political aspects might be difficult to achieve, but activists still felt that by joining forces they could have a greater impact. This held especially true in cases such as the March 23rd antiwar "Meeting of Intellectuals" and the ongoing "Boat for Vietnam" campaign. Cooperation could produce larger concrete contributions for the Vietnamese cause and expand public calls for an end to the Vietnam war. These multi-group activities marked the left's efforts to establish their position in the fight against the war, and to give the left a more powerful moral suasion that would make their efforts on behalf of Vietnam seem a real part of the Vietnamese fight.

In early December 1967, seventeen prominent French intellectuals including Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, François Mauriac and Louis Aragon published a "Call to Intellectuals" demanding that all those who could be called intellectuals -- "artists and writers, scholars and practitioners, engineers and technicians, doctors and teachers" -- pool their cultural capital take a stand against the Vietnam War.<sup>6</sup> Intellectuals of all types quickly signed on: by early February 1968, the petitioners had collected 4,000 signatures; by March 16th, over 8,000; by the day of the meeting on March 23rd, 17,000. They planned a meeting that was to be a cultural smorgasboard, including teach-in style "round tables" by experts on Vietnam such as Jean Chesneaux and Dr. Krivine, who had recently

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<sup>6</sup> "Samedi après-midi au parc des expositions de Paris: Rencontre des intellectuels pour le Vietnam," *L'Humanité* 19 March 1968. The seventeen original signers were Aragon, Simone de Beauvoir, Bernard Halpern, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Hélène Joliot-Langevin, Alfred Kastler, Antoine Lacassagne, André Massori, François Mauriac, Paul Miller, Jena Orcci, Pablo Picasso, Edouard Pignon, Jean-Paul Sartre, Elsa Triolet, Vercors, and Jean Vilar. The call and subsequent meeting are briefly discussed in Sirinelli's *Intellectuals and Passions Françaises*, 247.

travelled to Vietnam as part of the Russell Tribunal investigative team; a general meeting of intellectuals led by the seventeen original signers; showings of paintings and other antiwar art inspired by the war by prominent artists, including Picasso; and continual playings of Joris Ivens' recently released film "Le 17e Parallèle." A small bookstore would also operate during the meeting, allowing those interested to buy the most recent works on Vietnam. Expecting a crowd, the organizers reserved one of the large halls at the Parc des Expositions at the Porte de Versailles on the outskirts of Paris.<sup>7</sup>

The numbers who responded to the call gave French intellectuals a sense of power through unity in action. A delegation of the original signers met with Mai Van Bo, the North Vietnamese representative in Paris, to inform him of the petition's success and explain that they intended to "converge the action undertaken" in the March 23rd meeting. Mai Van Bo responded that North Vietnam would send its own intellectuals to participate on that day, thus establishing a direct connection with the Vietnamese fighters.<sup>8</sup> Vercors, writing in *Le Monde*, rhapsodized about the meeting's plans, proclaiming that it was proof that the world, especially the French, had had enough of American atrocities and was no longer willing to sit back and do nothing. "In a few weeks," he exclaimed, "without publicity, more than 7000 signatures!" Many had given money or goods. Those who signed, he noted, came from "all the disciplines, all the horizons," including "prestigious persons -- and among them a number of people who

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<sup>7</sup> "Une 'journée des intellectuels pour le Vietnam' à Paris, le 23 Mars," *Le Figaro* 15 March 1968; "23 mars au Parc des Expositions: Journée des intellectuels à l'appel d'Aragon, Picasso, J-P Sartre, François Mauriac, et de milliers d'écrivains, enseignants et artistes," *L'Humanité* 16 March 1968; "Samedi après-midi au parc des expositions de Paris: Rencontre des intellectuels pour le Vietnam," *L'Humanité* 19 March 1968; "La journée des intellectuels pour le Vietnam," *Le Monde* 26 March 1968.

<sup>8</sup> "L'organisation de la journée du 23 mars," *Le Monde* 3-4 March 1968.

have never before signed anything." The togetherness was refreshing. "A sort of sacred union," Vercors sighed. "It warms the heart."<sup>9</sup>

The "sacred union" played into a long tradition of French intellectual petitions and meetings on behalf of perceived aggrieved parties. As Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch wrote in *L'Humanité*, "this is not the first time that French intellectuals, in large numbers, take the part of the victim against the aggressor: our history teems with examples." In France, an intellectual's actions had strong ramifications for the country as a whole. Thorez-Vermeersch noted, "Intellectuals play a considerable role in the nation, by their thoughts, their words, their writings, the expression of their art. The works of writers, of poets, just like the role of the teacher, intervene in a considerable fashion in the formation of generations."<sup>10</sup> With the petition and the March 23 meeting, French intellectuals were attempting to insert their anti-war efforts into a French tradition dating back to the Dreyfus Affair. Taking an engaged position, they argued that because of their status as cultural creators their words and images resonated in a way that could affect change: by voicing their opposition to the Vietnam War, they believed they gave tangible support to the Vietnamese fighters while guiding others in their country to this support as well.

The day itself was a rousing success. Attendees, estimated at 12,000, heard numerous luminaries speak. Picasso informed the crowd that "All of modern art is with Vietnam!" and the plethora of well-known sculptors and artists present seemed to support

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<sup>9</sup> Vercors, "Libres Opinions: Réciprocité," *Le Monde* 3-4 March 1968.

<sup>10</sup> Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch, "23 mars: Honneur des lettres, des arts, des sciences: Les intellectuels français avec le Vietnam," *L'Humanité* 21 March 1968.

his contention.<sup>11</sup> At the end of the day, the group released two more calls to intellectuals.

One, addressed to French intellectuals, asked that the French effort be continued and expanded. "May thousands more signatures come join those 17,000 intellectuals who associated themselves with the Call of the 17," the authors proclaimed. "May, in the major cities of France, intellectuals converge their action in days of intellectuals for Vietnam, similar to what we have done today." Asking for money so that they could publish this call in American newspapers, the authors then concluded, "We will thus bring our contribution to the efforts of all those who, in the world, act for Vietnam."<sup>12</sup>

The other call cast its net wider, addressing itself to "intellectuals of the world." In it, the authors remarked that "By expressing together their consciences' revolt, intellectuals are bringing an irreplaceable contribution to the general movement in favor of Vietnam." They proposed an "international meeting of intellectuals for Vietnam," stating "May the intellectuals of the world unite their voice, and, supporting the liberation fight of the Vietnamese people, may they respond victoriously to this challenge thrown to the values of human culture."<sup>13</sup> With the gauntlet thus thrown, the meeting dispersed, in a confident showing of intellectual influence and unity.

The other major unitary action of the French left during this time period had more concrete goals than providing moral support for the Vietnamese. With "A Boat for Vietnam," campaigners aimed to gather money and supplies for the North Vietnamese, who, they argued, had lost much due to constant American bombing. Thirty-six different

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<sup>11</sup> Martine Monod, "Ample succès du rendez-vous du parc des Expositions, des milliers d'intellectuels avec le Vietnam. Ils invitent tous les intellectuels français à développer l'action et proposent une rencontre internationale," *L'Humanité* 25 March 1968.

<sup>12</sup> "Aux intellectuels de France: Poursuivons notre action," *L'Humanité* 25 March 1968.

<sup>13</sup> "Aux intellectuels du monde: Recontrons-nous," *L'Humanité* 25 March 1968.

French organizations joined together to launch the collection effort, including the Parti Communiste Français, the Comité Vietnam National, the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire, the "Billion Franc" campaign, and the French Committee of Christian Conscience for Peace.<sup>14</sup> Participants were encouraged to contribute whatever amount they could give. Organizers published lists of essential items which could then be bought: surgical trouses for 200 francs, a kilo of quinine for 250.<sup>15</sup> All materials would then be delivered to le Havre, where they would be shipped on the Soviet boat the "Akademik-Krylove," or Marseille, where they would travel with the Soviets on the "Solechnogorsk." Moscow had volunteered to provide free transport.

Before the project ended with the boats' departure in late February, participants provided nearly 450 million ancien francs worth of goods. The Secours Populaire Français gathered 20 million ancien francs, which it converted into three ambulances and 50 tons of merchandise.<sup>16</sup> From the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire came a ton and a half of scientific publications for use in North Vietnam era universities. The "Billion Francs" campaign donated 25 million ancien francs which became, among other things, 1000 surgical trouses and 300 defribillators.<sup>17</sup> A French firm, working with French doctors who had visited Vietnam, created a "Vietnamese bicycle" for medical workers. Smaller in size than normal bikes, it had been adjusted to allow for travelling along dark

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<sup>14</sup> CAC 20000529 art 2, PCF flyer, "Parisiennes, Parisiens, versez par millions pour le bateau de solidarité avec le Vietnam," 1968; "Un appel du Comité Vietnam National," *Le Monde* 31 December 1967/1 January 1968; "Deux appels à la veille de la Semaine pour l'unité des Chrétiens," *Le Monde* 13 janvier 1968.

<sup>15</sup> "Un nouvel appel de la 'campagne du milliard," *Le Monde* 31 December 1967/1 January 1968.

<sup>16</sup> "Le Bateau de la solidarité," *Avec le Vietnam* 1 (February 1968): 3. Although the change to the new franc had occurred several years prior, fundraising prices were generally given in ancien francs.

<sup>17</sup> "La campagne du 'bateau pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* February 22 1968.

and damaged roads, and came equipped with a saddlebag containing medicines, a defibrillator and a surgical trousse.<sup>18</sup> At a gathering to celebrate the boat's launch, one excited protestor even handed over his guitar, which, *Rivarol* snidely remarked, was such a beautiful gesture it almost made the folks at *L'Humanité* cry.<sup>19</sup>

Even without musical accompaniment, the launches were a large party. At Le Havre, protestors bussed in from Paris joined with protestors hailing from the Normandy region in a large procession down to the quai, yelling "Peace in Vietnam!" and "Johnson, assassin!" Politicians who witnessed the boats' departure included members of the PCF and of the Parti Socialiste Unifié, as well as Tran Viet Durig, representing North Vietnam, and Boris Soukharev from the USSR.<sup>20</sup> Upon loading the boats in Marseille, the dockers were purportedly so moved by the gifts and the thousands demonstrating that they donated their daily salaries.<sup>21</sup>

To the organizers, the flood of contributions demonstrated that the French left could overcome their political differences in support of the Vietnamese people. The National Committee, comprised of the 36 participating organizations, published an announcement congratulating itself on the campaign's success. "Millions of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, of all opinions and [social] conditions, participated in this effort. We

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<sup>18</sup> "Une firme française entreprend la fabrication d'une 'bicyclette vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 17 January 1968.

<sup>19</sup> G.-A. B., "Marie-Louise et Marie-Chinoise de l'ex Boul-Mich", *Rivarol* 29 February 1968.

<sup>20</sup> "En présence de M. Waldeck Rochet: Manifestation au Havre à l'occasion de l'arrivée d' 'un bateau pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 20 February 1968.

<sup>21</sup> "A Marseille, une manifestation de solidarité a marqué le chargement du 'bateau pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 21 February 1968.



thank them very warmly."<sup>22</sup> Through the joint action, two large boats had departed with essential cargo for the Vietnamese. More than just calling for peace in Vietnam, as the government did while maintaining a neutral stance, the left, through the "Boat" campaign, actively supported North Vietnam and the Freedom Fighters by sending them important material goods. It was a perfect mix of moral and concrete assistance that mirrored the perfect mix of political groups participating. As *L'Humanité* described it, the Campaign had allowed, "through a popular outburst of exceptional size, to show that Frenchmen and Frenchwomen of the most varied political, philosophical or religious opinions wanted to jointly demonstrate their solidarity to the Vietnamese people."<sup>23</sup>

### **Cracks in the Facade: Growing Clashes on the Left**

Divisions on the left had become so strong, however, that even a unitary effort like the "A Boat for Vietnam" campaign could not be free from in-fighting. While political parties and organizations on the left had always indicated diverse opinions and resultant conflicts, and while the Vietnam War had given rise to previous clashes, the months preceding May '68 held a special significance because it was during this time that clashes with other leftist groups and a growing youth power caused the French Communist Party to shift some of its approaches. During these three months, the PCF changed its slogan on Vietnam from "Peace in Vietnam" to "The National Liberation Front Will Win." It also created its own Vietnam committee, the "Comité National d'Action pour le soutien et la victoire du peuple vietnamien," [National Action Committee for the Support and Victory of the Vietnamese People, henceforth CNA],

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<sup>22</sup> "Un bateau pour le Vietnam: Plus de 400 millions (argent et dons en nature) collectés," *L'Humanité* 5 February 1968.

<sup>23</sup> "Des milliers des Français ont versé pour le bateau de la solidarité," *L'Humanité* 24 February 1968.

characterized notably by the development of "local-action" committees that resembled the Maoist *Comités Vietnam de Base*. The PCF's changes and the dialogue that emerged from the conflicts around them demonstrate the increasing tension among the left and the rising importance of youth activists.

The fight around the "Boat for Vietnam" arose from an earlier joint protest planned for February 13th. Multiple organizations called for a protest in front of the American embassy "to support the glorious fight of the Vietnamese people."<sup>24</sup> An event poster created by the *Comité Vietnam National* proclaimed "Long live the Vietnamese people! The NLF in Saigon! The Americans out the door!"<sup>25</sup> The CNA, the PSU and the CGT threw their weight behind the call, as did others.<sup>26</sup> Preparations were well under way when the *préfecture de police* refused to authorize the protest location. Forced to regroup quickly, the organizers released a statement condemning the police refusal and asking protestors to participate instead in a march from the République to the Bastille.<sup>27</sup>

Despite a constant downpour, the protest drew several thousand people, who marched through the streets carrying North Vietnamese and NLF flags along with caricatures of President Johnson and "Che" Guevara. Counter-protestors at one point broke into the march attempting to rip down the red flags, but order was quickly restored and the rest of the demonstration went off without a hitch. No incidents occurred at the

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<sup>24</sup> Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire D'Action Pour la Paix au Viet Nam flyer, February 1968, CAC 20000529 art 2.

<sup>25</sup> "Vive le peuple vietnamien," 1968, CAC 20000529 art 2.

<sup>26</sup> Supporters included le Comité national d'action pour le soutien et la victoire du peuple vietnamien, le parti communiste français, le Mouvement de la jeunesse communiste, la Confédération générale du travail, le Mouvement de la paix, le Comité vietnam national, le Mouvement contre l'armement atomique, l'Association d'amitié franco-vietnamienne, and l'Union des femmes françaises.

<sup>27</sup> "Interdite devant l'ambassade américaine, la manifestation du comité de soutien du peuple vietnamien se déroulera mardi de la République à la Bastille," *Le Monde*, 13 February 1968.

Embassy, which had been surrounded by a large police contingent and metal barriers just in case. Simultaneous protests in the provinces marched in front of their respective American Consulates, brandishing similar flags and yelling similar slogans. All in all, the demonstration was a success.<sup>28</sup>

It was thus much to the Communists' surprise when the CVN, a week later, published a statement in *Le Monde* arguing that the protest, "which unfolded without incident, should have, as they had asked the organizers, taken place at the Place de la Concorde and not at the Place de la République." The Communists immediately objected. They denounced the CVN's claim that they had not wanted the march at République, pointing out that all organizers had been informed when the original location was forbidden and Nicolas Boulet of the CVN had agreed to the location change. They then accused the CVN of hypocrisy, asking, "Why are the Comité Vietnam National's directors disavowing today what they approved yesterday? Why [does the CVN] always try to give lessons to everyone else, even though at this date of February 19th they still have not given any money to the Boat, whereas the PCF, the object of their attacks, has sent off 205 million [ancien] francs?"<sup>29</sup>

The CVN's response to this riposte brought into sharp relief the on-going tensions between itself and the French Communist Party. The CVN had, they noted, given money to the "Boat" campaign. But to the Comité Vietnam National, the way this accusation defamed their character had more to do with the Communists's desire for control, than with how much money the "Boat" had collected. The CVN noted that during the

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<sup>28</sup> "A Paris, plusieurs dizaines de milliers de manifestants défilent pour exprimer leur solidarité 'aux combattants du Vietnam,'" *Le Monde* 15 février 1968.

<sup>29</sup> "A propos d'un communiqué du Comité Vietnam National," *L'Humanité* 20 February 1968.

February 13th protest in Nice, which was supposed to be unitary, members of the PCF had ripped down CVN banners and tore up a Hanoi newspaper CVN members were distributing. Allegedly, the federal secretary of the Communist Party had even smacked one of the Comité Vietnam militants.<sup>30</sup> For the CVN, the Communists's desire to control everything was not just hurting the CVN, but was hurting the cause as well: working together to support the Vietnamese should have been the "primordial concern of all organizations."<sup>31</sup>

In an attempt to re-assert control over the general movement, the PCF, as noted, changed its slogan from "Peace in Vietnam" to "NLF will win!" The underlying call for an end to the war remained the same, but the new version took a stronger stand in favor of the North. That the slogan was not entirely original did not escape observers. *L'Express* noted that the new, less "timorous" call copied from "the slogan in use for more than a year now by leftist groups: the "Billion Francs" groups, organized around intellectuals Paul Fraisse, Jérôme Lindon, Aimé Césaire and René Capitant, or the Comité Vietnam National, led by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir."<sup>32</sup> The CVN commented complacently that it "congratulated itself that the committee recently created by the Central Committee of the PCF [the CNA] is basing its action on watchwords identical to the CVN's."<sup>33</sup> It seemed nothing more than an attempt to position the PCF at the forefront of a movement over which it was rapidly losing power, and indicated the PCF's growing fear of the strength of groups farther to the left than itself.

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<sup>30</sup> "Après les incidents de Nice," *Le Monde* 29 February 1968.

<sup>31</sup> "L'heure n'est plus aux processions," *Vietnam* 4 (March 1968).

<sup>32</sup> "Vietnam: Le PC passe aux actes," *L'Express* 869 (12-18 February) 1968.

<sup>33</sup> "Un appel du CVN," *Vietnam* 3 (February 1968).

If the CVN found the slogan switch suspicious, their views were nothing compared with the vitriol of the Maoist CVBs. "If [the Communists are] talking about victory [now]," the CVBs noted, "it's so they don't have to explain themselves." In the view of the CVBs, "pacifism [for the PCF] may have passed to the second plan, but it's far from having disappeared."<sup>34</sup> The CVB sanctioned only specific ways of supporting Vietnam, and most of the PCF's -- and the CVN's -- actions fell outside of this realm. Instead of large-scale protests featuring big names, the Maoist groups still insisted on small, local activities which closely followed their reading of the Vietnamese line. A minority group but extremely vocal, the CVBs' actions established strong cleavages in the left between mass groups with prominent, adult members, and the burgeoning numbers of student activists.

Unlike other groups, the CVBs absolutely refused to participate in the "Boat" campaign. Their political agenda insisted that they follow "a line based on the defense and the popularization of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the NLF's positions," and if these positions were supported, the CVBs would participate. But they would not advocate unity for unity's sake. If the political view was "erroneous, pacifist for example, then unity of action is impossible, at the grassroots as well as at the summit."<sup>35</sup> In the case of the "Boat" campaign, the CVBs believed that the other groups had deviated egregiously from the acceptable political line. Because the "Boat" campaign's political call was "Peace in Vietnam," the campaign was pacifist; thus participating in it -- even if

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<sup>34</sup> "Congrès des Comités Vietnam de Base: Texte préparatoire à la commission 'rapports avec les autres organisations' " March 1968: 1, BDIC F delta 701/2.

<sup>35</sup> CVB "Rapport avec les autres organisations: soutien financier," February 1968, BDIC F Delta Res 613/5.

it provided important materials for the freedom fighters -- meant taking away from the real propaganda fight for victory in favor of pacifism.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the CVBs argued against any action that smacked of paternalism. Continually desirous to study at "the school of Vietnam," they resented actions that implied the Vietnamese rebels would not be able to defeat the U.S. without outside help. The boat, with its collected goods, represented nothing more than a hand-out. Rather than encouraging the Vietnamese, the CVBs argued, this campaign, based on the "ultra-demobilizing sentiment of charity," would drag them down, reminding them of their subordinate position to the West.<sup>37</sup> Instead of offering a book or a bicycle, activists in France needed to spread the Vietnamese message, as the Vietnamese stated it, and encourage others to believe their views.

For the CVBs, however, this question of influence could not come through the intervention of well-known intellectuals. One of their central reproaches to the CVN lay in its formation around a group of "well-known personalities" who seemed more interested in how bright their own stars shone than in distributing information about Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> The CVBs continually complained that a focus on high-level personalities meant that work at the base got neglected. Instead of supporting the Vietnamese on their own terms -- most notably through distribution of the Hanoi-produced *Courrier du Vietnam* -- the CVBs claimed the CVN used its star power to create a momentary, spectacular impact with no follow-up. Instead of mass appeal, they felt, the CVN offered

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. and "Pourquoi nous ne participons pas au 'Bateau pour le Vietnam,'" *Victoire pour le Vietnam* January 1968.

<sup>37</sup> "Congrès des Comités Vietnam de Base: Texte préparatoire à la commission 'rapports avec les autres organisations' " March 1968, BDIC F delta 701/2.

<sup>38</sup> "Congrès des Comités Vietnam de Base: Texte préparatoire."

bright lights and bureaucracy. But big names were not necessary to move forward the fight; local, direct action worked better.

It should be noted that dissension over the influence of big names and protests versus direct action did not exist only between the CVBs and the CVN. In fact, a division arose within the CVN itself, between those who took a more political line and a younger crowd looking for more violent displays. As committee founder Laurent Schwartz remembered, to these youth simple demonstrations "were just not interesting, not important, inefficient and sorry-looking. I knew it was true," he lamented, "but I didn't see how to go farther. After all, we weren't about to set bombs in front of the American Embassy!"<sup>39</sup> The push for violent actions would have an important impact as events unrolled before May '68.

But in the Maoist view, the division within the CVN did not matter: only the CVBs had properly supported Vietnam's fight. "In spite of the victorious development of the Vietnamese people's war, no one has popularized this war of the people," the CVBs concluded in a report written at the end of their mass meeting in February 1968. "No one distributed their political positions[...] No one explained the profound reasons for their victories, or the consequence of these victories for all the world's people."<sup>40</sup> Instead of acting in a way that highlighted the strength of Vietnam, French protests had offered a series of actions that painted the Vietnamese as weak.

The largest split on the left lay between the PCF and the CVBs. Conflicts over how to protest and whom to reach exacerbated an already wide ideological gulf. The

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<sup>39</sup> Laurent Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling With His Century*, 399.

<sup>40</sup> "Congrès des Comités Vietnam de Base: Rapport Politique. Rapport de clôture," March 1968, BDIC F 701/2.

Communist Party, to the Maoists, was guilty of subordination to Moscow and its belief in "peaceful coexistence" which denied revolutionary movements the chance to go forward. Their recent embrace of the slogan "NLF will win!" was therefore suspect. By supporting methods which were disconnected from the Vietnamese people, they were nothing more than "false friends" of Vietnam.<sup>41</sup> To the Communists, the Maoists were nothing more than troublemakers. By striking out against the PCF - at least once physically attacking a PCF cell - the CVBs disrupted the chances for supporting Vietnam. In fact, the Communists did not hesitate to suggest that the CVBs were not really Maoist revolutionaries at all, but rather tools of Gaullist oppression. Their newspapers, the PCF noted, regularly attacked the Communists, but spared the government. Wondering where the CVBs got money for their publications (although not outright accusing them of receiving Gaullist funds), the PCF decried CVB actions as disrupting revolution in France. "You can not be simultaneously with the Vietnamese communists and against the French communists. You can not be simultaneously against American imperialism and with French imperialism," the PCF argued. Those who accused the PCF of being revisionist, those who "spread divisions, preach anti-communism," the PCF warned, "should not be surprised to find us strongly blocking their path, solidly holding our post in both the ongoing battle for Vietnam and in the ideological struggle against all the thrill-seeking groupuscules who are doing the work of the international and French reactionary community." The PCF claimed it would not tolerate any dissension, and in challenging the CVBs it professed to be acting in a revolutionary fashion: "[We do this]

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<sup>41</sup> "Congrès des Comités Vietnam de Base: Textes préparatoires."



in the interest of the Vietnamese and the French people, for their common and rapid victory over imperialism."<sup>42</sup>

In order to combat fully the CVBs' influence, the PCF set its sights on the demographic most attracted to the CVBs: youth. When the Parti created the Comité National d'Action, "Action Committees" comprised a central component. These committees were intended to be small groups of activists operating at a local level, dedicated to work on Vietnam. All interested "men, women and youth" could join.<sup>43</sup> Within a month and a half from the creation of the CNA, 1500 action committees had been formed. Action committees were special, PCF leader Georges Marchais explained, because experience had shown that they allowed "a large number of men, women and youth, of diverse opinions but feeling solidarity with the noble cause for which the Vietnamese people are fighting" to join up with the Communists. By working in action committees, activists could have "simultaneously the constant expansion of the mass movement in support of heroic Vietnam, and the permanent and efficient organization of solidarity with the Vietnam people."<sup>44</sup> The Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communiste de la France greeted the move enthusiastically, declaring that "this great initiative fully responds to the aspirations of hundreds of thousands of young Frenchmen." It would, they affirmed, "allow them to organize themselves on a more massive level against the criminal aggression of American imperialists in Vietnam."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Parti Communiste Français, "Demain... la gauche unie," April 1968, CAC 20000529 art 2.

<sup>43</sup>"Cent meetings pour le soutien et la victoire du peuple vietnamien," *L'Humanité* 27 January 1968.

<sup>44</sup> Georges Marchais, "Une tâche essentielle," *Avec le Vietnam* 2 (March 1968).

<sup>45</sup>"Le Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communiste dans le combat," *L'Humanité* 24 janvier 1968.

That the "action committees" seemed to be imitating the format of the CVBs' local-based groups was not lost on observers. Yet in reality, the overall structure of the "action committees" within the CNA replicated the structure of the Parti Communiste Français: an "action committee" (which corresponded to the local "cellule") reported to a "departmental action committee" (which corresponded to departmental Communist authorities), which in turn reported to the Comité National d'Action (which corresponded to the PCF's ultimate control). But the attempt to create even the appearance of a local, youth-oriented protest format revealed the Party's desire to capitalize on youth energy and, as *L'Express* remarked, "their fear to see themselves overtaken by some 'uncontrollable leftist elements'." Indeed, the threat to the PCF appeared so great that *L'Express* captioned a photo of Communist demonstrators armed with clubs with the line "Out of fear of the pro-Chinese." Aware that anti-Vietnam War protests were drawing more young people than any other political activity, the PCF staked out its territory and attempted to establish control.<sup>46</sup> The move indicated both the sharp divisions between many young activists and the party, and the perceived growing threat of a youth-based movement on the left, which accepted neither national control along party lines, the influence of big names, nor the rationale for indirect action. These developments would have had important implications on how various elements of the left reacted when May '68 broke out.

### **Same Day, Different Protest: Examples of Divisions on the Left in the 21 février Protests**

Splits on the left played out in a clear fashion during the protests planned around February 21, 1968. The year before, leftist activists had reclaimed the day, previously

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<sup>46</sup> "Vietnam: Le PC passe aux actes," *L'Express* 869 (12-18 February 1968).

used to protest imperialism but fallen into disuse since the end of the Algerian War, as a day specifically concentrated around anti-Vietnam War protests. The choice of this date placed Vietnam War demonstrations into a French tradition of resistance against violent aggression. A flyer placed by the CVBs presented the protests as part of a continuum, calling people to participate and proclaiming:

February 21 1944:

A group of foreign-born resistants are shot by the Nazis for having participated in the French people's fight for independence. This date is traditionally an international day against colonialism and fascism. A few years ago, workers' unions and students launched protest marches against the Algerian War.

February 21 1968:

Today the most powerful imperialism, US imperialism, is unmasked in the eyes of the world by a barbaric aggressiveness, a fascist repression in Vietnam.<sup>47</sup>

Cast in this light, those who fought in France against the war in Vietnam marched in the footsteps of French freedom fighters before them. The day had strong symbolic import, and all groups planned actively for its undertaking. Yet each group's planning followed a different path, demonstrating both the PCF's continued attempts to hold on to the youth element and the growing divisions over types of appropriate protest.

When the PCF gathered at the Cirque d'Hiver on the afternoon of February 21st, they did so with the youth elements of their party at the forefront. Aware that their young members had "their eyes fixed on Vietnam" and "lived" to see Vietcong victories, the Party organized an event that would place them into contact with young Vietnamese students. It would, they assured, give the youth "the possibility to say to the young Vietnamese themselves: we are your brothers, your sisters, your fight is our fight." The meeting would be a send-off for numerous other meetings to show solidarity, and in the

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<sup>47</sup> "Un mois d'action pour le 21 février", February 1968, BDIC F delta Res 613/5.

view of the PCF "nothing more effective could be done that day" to support the Vietnamese.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to establishing contacts between young French communists and the Vietnamese, the meeting offered another treat for participants: a special viewing of the program that the television show "Ce jour-là" had created around the Communist protest on November 26, 1967. For the segment, cameramen and an interviewer had followed a group of Communist youths as they went door-to-door in their city, drumming up donations for Vietnam, before taking a bus trip to Paris to join 70,000 others in protesting the war.<sup>49</sup> The thousands who had taken part, organizers assured, "are going to want to see the film of their protest, relive this unforgettable day, an important stage in the raising of consciousness, of action, and of combativity of young French people for the support and the victory of Vietnam."<sup>50</sup> Through links with past activism and a present-day connection with real live Vietnamese people, the Communist version of February 21st aimed to cement the significance of the Communist youth movement to Vietnam and to France's understanding of the world.

When the meeting took place, *L'Humanité* rejoiced. Thousands of Communist youths turned out to watch international leaders speak. "On this February 21st, a day against imperialism across the world for the young and students, Paris was singled out," Charles Silvestre cheered. Talking to the Communists "and through them, to the youth of our country," the leaders explained the Vietnamese fight. "This could not have

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<sup>48</sup> François Hilsum, "...Et maintenant le 21 février au Cirque d'hiver avec les jeunes vietnamiens à Paris."

<sup>49</sup> INAthèque "Ce jour-là: 26 novembre," file IKM 3506 (4) Volume 1/1. Although the depiction in the segment is generally favorable, editors did include several interview responses which showed a lack of knowledge on basic issues (the use of napalm and of cluster bombs) by protesters.

<sup>50</sup> François Hilsum, "...Et maintenant le 21 février au Cirque d'hiver avec les jeunes vietnamiens à Paris."

happened," Silvestre explained, "if millions of our country's youth were not intimately, individually, scandalized by American aggression, and if hundreds of millions of them were not ready to express their sympathy for the Vietnamese."<sup>51</sup> For the PCF, their Communist youth led the fight in France.

Reading *L'Humanité*, one would have believed that the Cirque d'Hiver meeting had been the biggest happening of the evening. The article on their young comrades covered part of the first and fourth page. Tucked away in the center of the fourth page, a small article mentioned that there had been some disturbance in the Latin Quarter. With no analysis or extra commentary, they gave a bare-bones sketch of events. "At the start of the afternoon," *L'Humanité* noted off-handedly, "students gathered in the courtyard of the Sorbonne and marched down the Boulevard St. Michel, whose plaques had been replaced by others: 'Heroic Vietnam.' Shortly thereafter the name of Nguyen Van Troi was written on the walls of the lycée Saint-Louis, and finally an effigy of Johnson stuffed with straw was hung from the archangel's head in the St. Michel fountain was lit on fire by the students."<sup>52</sup>

Their description, while accurate, muted the spark of the real events. The Latin Quarter undertaking had been coordinated by a number of groups, most notably the CVN and the UNEF. In protests aimed at turning the Latin Quarter into the "Heroic Vietnam Quarter," activists claimed several key landmarks for Vietnam as part of the international struggle, hanging the NLF flag from the Sorbonne and renaming streets and a high school. Rather than an indoor gathering with speeches such as the Communists planned,

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Silvestre, "Hier soir, au Cirque d'Hiver, répondant à l'appel de la JC, des milliers de garçons et de filles ont acclamé les représentants de la jeunesse vietnamienne," *L'Humanité* 22 February 1968.

<sup>52</sup> "Manifestation au quartier Latin," *L'Humanité* 22 February 1968.

this protest featured marches, burning effigies, and a large banner with "NLF will win!" in flaming letters. It drew more participants and generated more press attention than the Communist meeting.

Part of the difference in the protests arose from a recent push for more direct protest by the CVN. Although the PCF had adopted some of the slogans and structures of its younger counterparts, it retained its overall bureaucracy and traditional protest modes. For the CVN and the UNEF in early '68, simple demonstrations no longer sufficed. The Vietnamese had won important military battles against the U.S., the CVN explained, but American imperialism "also needed to be isolated politically."<sup>53</sup> Since it was "no longer the time for processions," the new protests aimed to connect actions in France directly to the Vietnam movement by moving from "humanitarian aid to political support," so that, as the UNEF wrote, "we respond to the escalade of [American] aggression with an escalade of solidarity, each day more efficient."<sup>54</sup> Such political action particularly needed to take place in Europe, because "the roots of aggression can also be found in Europe in the support that most of the Western European governments and a large number of European trusts brought to the American war effort."<sup>55</sup> In retaking the Latin Quarter for Vietnam, the groups planned to create a French space in which to carry on the fight against American imperialism.

The protests went off without a hitch, receiving a large amount of press, but even this "political" action against imperialism did not suffice for the CVBs. Early in the

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<sup>53</sup> Editorial, "Salut au peuple vietnamien victorieux," *Vietnam* February 1968.

<sup>54</sup> "L'heure n'est plus aux processions," *Vietnam* March 1968; "Le Quartier Latin pour le Vietnam: Appel aux Etudiants d'Europe," February 1968, CAC 20000529 art 2.

<sup>55</sup> "Le Quartier Latin pour le Vietnam: Appel aux Etudiants d'Europe," February 1968, CAC 20000529 art 2.

planning, they rejected the CVN's invitation to work together, claiming that the CVN's refusal to distribute the NLF's political program and its criticism of some of the NLF's stands made them guilty of "hypocrisy" and "treason."<sup>56</sup> Instead of a "false unity," the CVBs planned to have a number of local base groups work throughout the day, diffusing Vietnamese propaganda, before meeting at a central point. Activists showed up on the Champs-Élysées -- a protest location that the préfecture had forbidden -- with newspapers and "explanatory panels," and clashed with police, resulting in nearly 40 arrests. In an attempt to take even more direct action, they moved from there to the South Vietnamese embassy. Before being dispersed by the police, they hung the NLF flag from the building and threw rocks through the windows. Their night ended in a fight with police at the Place de Clichy. This kind of direct action with propaganda, in their view, made the fight on French soil a more real part of the Vietnam War. Like those who went before them, they were resisting imperialist powers at home and abroad, but in their separate actions they were creating important divisions among the left.

### **Street Battles for France: Fighting Between the Right and the Left**

However, conflicts during this time period did not consist solely of in-fighting among leftist groups. Just as important was an on-going clash with the extreme right. As historians have noted, the Vietnam War did not mobilize the right, especially right-wing intellectuals, to the extent that the Algerian War did.<sup>57</sup> Yet if no "petition war" took place this time, several pitched battles did. Right-wing editorialists and journalists lashed out

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<sup>56</sup> *Victoire pour le Vietnam*, 21 February 1968.

<sup>57</sup> See in particular Jean-François Sirinelli's analysis in *Intellectuels et passions françaises* and *Les baby-boomers Une Génération, 1945-1969*.

against the leftist activists in France and argued in support of the American war effort. Right-wing student groups, notably "Occident," fought viciously with left-wing student groups for control over university areas. These arguments had two significant effects on developments in France during the period preceding 1968. First, the battles of words between left and right wingers highlighted the radically divided images of France at work, and the continual struggle over French national and international identity. Second, the physical battles on and off the streets between armed right and left-wing groups created an atmosphere of violence which generated tensions and heated up the forms protests took.

For many on the far right, the war in Vietnam fell into the worldwide fight between communism and liberty, characterized by a belief in the Domino Theory. In France, they saw opponents of freedom in the shape of the Communist Party, the leftist student movements, and in De Gaulle, whom right-wing activists frequently denounced as an "agent of the Kremlin."<sup>58</sup> While writers frequently mocked the seriousness of left-wing commitment to the Vietnam struggle ("One fights for Vietnam from 5 to 7, now and then, before going out to the cinema or to check out the latest books at Maspero's store," one article remarked,) they felt a strong obligation to check perceived growing leftist activity in France.<sup>59</sup> Frequently, their attacks on the left were met with counter-attacks, both verbal and physical.

A notable fight played out on February 7, when activists including anti-communist intellectual Suzanne Labin and former paratrooper Roger Holeindre staged a

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<sup>58</sup> "Merci, camarade Waldeck Rochet!," *Rivarol* February 22 1968.

<sup>59</sup> G.-A. B, "Marie-Louise et Marie-Chinoise de l'ex Boul-Mich," *Rivarol* 29 February 1968.



meeting for "friends of South Vietnam" at the Mutualité in Paris. "By your presence, you will show your support to the soldiers of the Free World who are fighting to save South Vietnam from communist dictatorship," the call for the meeting announced. "You will demand the end of communist aggression in South Vietnam and the installation of a just peace."<sup>60</sup> The rendez-vous would include lectures on the situation in South Vietnam. Holeindre and the nationalist student group Occident intended to provide "security."<sup>61</sup>

Students within the CVBs immediately launched plans to protest the meeting. Their calls reflected the way that Vietnam stoked opposing views of France, and the way in which past French events came continually into play during Vietnam protests. "No, French neo-nazis will not insult the heroic Vietnamese people!," CVB flyers read. Denouncing participants as "the collaborators of 1940, the killers of the OAS," people who had formerly supported the "repression of people under French imperialism," the CVBs claimed that the right-wingers had found their new champion in the U.S. "Those who applauded the execution of the FTP resistance group on February 21, 1944 are, today, the most loyal supporters of the new Nazis, the American imperialists," the CVBs declared. They refused to allow France to become a pro-American location, announcing "we can not tolerate having the Americans' fascist valets expressing themselves in Paris," and encouraging supporters to come out and counter-protest. They ended on an ominous note: "The French neo-nazis will meet the same end as their masters of yesterday and today." <sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Rivarol*, 1 February 1968.

<sup>61</sup> Frédéric Charpier, *Génération Occident*, 150.

<sup>62</sup> "Non les néo-nazis français n'insulteront pas l'héroïque peuple vietnamien," 1968, BDIC F delta Res 613/5.

The threat appeared serious enough to mobilize the Paris police force: when fights broke out on February 7th, they occurred between each groups' protestors and the police, rather than between the two groups themselves. The CVB mobilized over 3,000 counter-protestors on short notice, all of whom gathered at Place Maubert in the early evening on February 7th. Unable to stop the meeting, they nevertheless changed its tenure: because of the fear of possibly violent disruptions, organizers were forced to ID everyone entering, thus limiting the public reach of their words. Extremely pleased, the CVBs noted afterwards that the anti-imperialists were the only ones "who were able to speak in the road for the general population."<sup>63</sup> But as the meeting began under heavy police guard, chaos broke out in the streets. Shouting slogans such as "We won't tolerate shaved-headed fascists in para-trooper uniforms!," "Johnson, more violent than Hitler!," and singing the NLF's anthem, students attempted to get around the police blockade and enter the Mutualité by the back. Their charge was brutally pushed back by the police. Regrouping shortly thereafter on the Boulevard St. Germain, helmeted and sometimes armed protestors clashed with police again. This time, the police launched tear gas grenades, one of which landed in the middle of the well-known leftist hot spot, the café Deux-Magots, and caused the dining room to be evacuated in a panic.<sup>64</sup> The streets were cleared of left-wing protestors when the meeting finally let out two hours later. Militants pouring into the streets shouting "Vietcongs, assassins!" found the police waiting for them near the Odéon metro station. More fights broke out. In the end, thirty police

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<sup>63</sup>"Note sur le bilan de la manifestation du mercredi 7 février," BDIC F delta Res 613/4.

<sup>64</sup> "Violentes bagarres au quartier latin à l'occasion d'un meeting en faveur du Vietnam du Sud. Deux mille cinq cent sympathisants du Vietcong se sont heurtés aux forces de police," *Le Monde* 9 February 1968; "Violentes bagarres à Paris où la police a dispersé des manifestants opposés sur le Vietnam," *France-Soir* February 9 1968; "Pas de horions pour le 'Vietniks,'" *Rivarol* 15 February 1968.

officers had to be treated for injuries and two protestors, one from the right and one from the left, were arrested.<sup>65</sup>

Between the right and the left, then, the fight over Vietnam also served as a fight over France: what the country had been in the past, and who could speak for it now. To the left, the right-wingers in Occident and the "Front uni de soutien pour Vietnam de Sud" (United Support Front for South Vietnam, or Front uni,) contained the worst of France's repressive ancestry, from those who attacked the Resistance to those who supported the OAS during the Algerian War. As such, they could not be allowed to speak for France as the left envisioned it. Standing up for the Vietnamese meant placing France on a progressive course. For the right, the left-wingers represented the betrayers, those who had lost Algeria and France's glory, and who failed to appreciate those who had fought for this cause. To challenge this treason, the Front Uni organized two days of protests on March 30 and 31st, encouraging "each Frenchmen to place individually a simple bouquet on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier - or the monument closest to where they live - in memory of those who died for the noble cause of liberty, and more particularly those members of the French Expeditionary Corps who died in Indochina."<sup>66</sup> More than just a fight over who should win in Vietnam, the left-right clash concerned whose conception of France would dominate.

Frequently, right-wing challenges to the left were more violent in nature than the verbal sparring described above. Occident members often staked out areas in the Latin

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. *Rivarol* claimed the right-wing "adolescents" were "completely unarmed" and had left the meeting in "calm and order" before marching together to Odéon. Only one of the protestors, Gilles Caussiol, received a punishment; *France-Soir* reported that he was given a suspended sentence of one month in prison for carrying a pickax handle ("Manifestant jugé," *France-Soir* 11-12 February 1968).

<sup>66</sup> "Pour soutenir le Vietnam du Sud: Une 'manifestation silencieuse' Samedi à Paris," *Le Monde* 29 mars 1968.

Quarter and attacked militants distributing Vietnam information. A physical battle for control of University space, complete with fisticuffs and billy clubs, took place in Paris and in other University towns. Occident also kept up its attack on leftist activities outside the university, in one instance shredding posters and smashing windows in the cinema Studio Git-le-Coeur, which was showing a pro-Vietcong film, Joris Iven's *17ème Parallèle*. Occident militants put out an announcement claiming responsibility for the attack and for a simultaneous one on a Maoist bookstore, warning "The movement Occident has decided to make the troublemakers understand that [Occident] will no longer allow them to make the roads of Paris resemble those of Saigon."<sup>67</sup> This was a violent, no holds-barred struggle for possession of Parisian streets and for the very nature of France.

### **Sparks to a Powderkeg: Vietnam, Occident, and the Student Movement Before May '68**

The tinder box of leftist youth movements, right-wing nationalist student activists and Vietnam protests came to an explosive head in March and April of 1968. Reactions to the Vietnam War played a central role in how May '68 developed during this time. Vietnam offered the language to articulate the student fight as a liberation struggle, the practice of protest methods, and the knowledge of how to deal with violent confrontations. Both the impetus and the interpretation of the events at the Sorbonne on May 3rd depended upon tensions set up by Vietnam protests.

The major connection between Vietnam and the student movements became clear on March 18, 1968, when anti-war militants operating in the early morning hours ignited plastic explosives at three American businesses in Paris, succeeding in blowing up the

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<sup>67</sup> "Incidents à Paris et à Rennes," *Le Monde* 21-22 April 1968.

bay window at the TWA offices, scattering its brochures and pictures across the sidewalk.<sup>68</sup> Two days later, a group of nearly 300 protestors gathered in front of the American Express offices in the Rue Scribe, smashing its windows and spray-painting anti-American slogans on its walls in bright red. Confronted by the police, most protestors disappeared down neighboring streets and into the metro, but one, armed with a spray-paint can, was caught and brought in for questioning.<sup>69</sup> Shortly thereafter, police investigators arrested six students, including Nicolas Boulet, a prominent member of the Comité Vietnam National, in connection with the attacks.<sup>70</sup>

Many on the left immediately perceived the arrests as part of an attempt by authorities to repress an activist movement. The CVN published a communiqué to "alert public opinion about measures striking militants for Vietnam." It called for its members to "mobilize to put an end to the provocations of those in power" and asked that "all democratic organizations intervene to get the arrested militants liberated."<sup>71</sup> *L'Humanité* joined its voice to those calling for the protestor's liberation, but noted prudently that the Communist Party had always "affirmed the necessity in all domains of the largest mass struggle possible, and [had always] condemned individual acts which have no other result than to shrink the action and provide pretexts for repression."<sup>72</sup> But the most memorable

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<sup>68</sup> "Trois d'attentats à Paris contre des établissements américains," *L'Humanité* 19 March 1968; "Un seul commando pour les trois attentats du quartier de l'Opéra, pensent les policiers après les explosions qui ont endommagé trois établissements US," *France-Soir* 19 March 1968; J.S., "L'autre nuit, dans le quartier de l'opéra: Attentats à l'explosif contre trois sociétés américaines," *Le Figaro* 19 March 1968.

<sup>69</sup> "Rue Scribe: Vitaines brisées à l'American Express par 300 manifestants," *Le Figaro* 21 March 1968.

<sup>70</sup> "Après les attentats anti-américains de paris, M. Boulte, l'un des dirigeants du Comité Vietnam National et plusieurs lycéens sont arrêtés," *Le Monde* 23 March 1968.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> "Six militants pour le Vietnam arrêté à Paris," *L'Humanité* 23 March 1968.

response to the arrests came from a previously unknown group of students at a university on the outskirts of Paris. On March 22, 1968, one hundred and fifty students at Nanterre occupied a faculty conference room on campus to protest against the arrests, which included Nanterre students. They called for a strike from classes for the following Monday, and held a meeting to discuss both world politics and the situation of students in the French university system. Drawing inspiration from Fidel Castro's 26th July Movement, they called themselves the Mouvement du 22 Mars.<sup>73</sup>

The chain of events which took place from March 22 to the police invasion of the Sorbonne on May 3rd drew upon established tensions and ideas that had arisen in the anti-war protests. First, the arrests constituted the collision point of the Vietnam and the student movements. Prior to March 22nd, numerous protests had occurred within the university and notably at Nanterre -- a student strike had even already taken place -- but these actions were university-focused and not connected to the ongoing fight against the Vietnam War, although they involved many of the same militants. With the advent of the March 22 Movement, the student movement became more international. Part of this had been in development -- Daniel Cohn Bendit's close ties to Rudi Dutschke, who had argued that the German struggle was one for Vietnam, meant that cross-pollination had taken place -- but now in France the two were definitively joined, with the student movement linking its own specific concerns to a more general anti-imperialist agenda. Moreover, the perceived injustice of the students' arrest allowed the protestors to present the French state as unjust and themselves as fighting for a better way.

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<sup>73</sup> "Six étudiants interpellés par la PJ relâchés," *France-Soir* 24-25 March 1968; "Les attentats anti-américains de Paris: Les six jeunes gens interpellés sont remis en liberté," *Le Monde* 24-25 March 1968 ; "Manifestation à la faculté des lettres de Nanterre," *Le Figaro* 25 March 1968.

Protests at Nanterre continued to present an anti-imperialist theme. At a meeting on April 1st, a thousand students took over a lecture hall, where they heard Daniel Cohn-Bendit state their aims: "We want," he explained, "to establish all together a plan of action. We have to show the social function of the university. We refuse to be the future cadres of capitalist exploitations, and that's why we boycotted the exams which led us to this situation."<sup>74</sup> The floor was opened to comments, including an informative speech from a German SDS leader who explained how his group was fighting against German support for the Vietnam War. But the leaders worked hard to insure that the anti-imperialist line dominated. Calling for this meeting, they had described the student movement as an attempt to get political liberty at the university. But, they noted, "We will support no freedom of expression for those who are against the aggression in Vietnam."<sup>75</sup>

Their protests, although anti-imperialist in themes, gathered no support from the Communist Party, who saw them as upstarts, nothing more than kids playing at being revolutionaries. *L'Humanité* mocked the multiplicity of groups at Nanterre which they said totaled at most "200 students considered by thousands of others as 'outlandish' and offering the press, on a silver platter, a certain image of student political activity. Only the Communist students," they proudly noted, "have been able to, on the subject of Vietnam, get one thousand students to participate in acts of solidarity."<sup>76</sup> Protestors at

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<sup>74</sup> "Nouvelle agitation à la faculté des lettres de Nanterre," *Le Monde* 3 April 1968.

<sup>75</sup> Claude Gambiez, "Faculté des Lettres de Nanterre: "Nous reportons à mardi notre réunion d'aujourd'hui," ont déclaré les meneurs de l'agitation," *Le Figaro* 30-31 March 1968.

<sup>76</sup> Charles Silvestre, "Cours suspendus jusqu'à lundi à la Faculté des Lettres de Nanterre. 12000 étudiants victimes de la carence gouvernementale qui favorise les menées d'éléments irresponsables," *L'Humanité* 29 March 1968.

Nanterre were depicted, as the CVBs had been before them, as fake activists whose "outrage gratifie[d] the government, favorise[d] those who are for repression, in a word, contributes to isolating the students from the fight for democracy," whereas the Communists and the Communist youth represented, as an April 8th *Humanité* headline proclaimed, "the most important political organization of the French youth."<sup>77</sup> The divisions which had been highlighted by Vietnam War protests came into full force here.

Despite the disapproval of the PCF, the intensity of protests stayed high, in part because of the constant threat of, or actual experience of, violence from right-wing militants, a violence which had played out in Vietnam War protests and which still maintained connections to the Vietnam War movement while confronting student events at Nanterre. As mentioned above, those involved in the Mouvement du 22 mars considered part of their fight to involve quashing pro-U.S. sentiment. The right was similarly concerned with keeping Nanterre from becoming the sole domain of the left. The FNEF, a right-wing student group at Nanterre with connections to Occident, spoke up against "the terrorism and anarchy that overexcited extreme-leftists intend to have reign over Nanterre under the pretext of political protests."<sup>78</sup> They called for the leftists to be stopped, if necessary with outside intervention.<sup>79</sup> In April, a fight broke out at a UNEF meeting between leftists calling for a politicization of all groups and right-wing extremists who had interrupted the meeting; shortly thereafter, the offices of the FNEF at

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<sup>77</sup> "Nouvelle manifestation 'anarchiste' à la Faculté de Nanterre," *L'Humanité* 3 April 1968.

<sup>78</sup> No title, *Le Figaro* 27 March 1968.

<sup>79</sup> "L'agitation des étudiants: Nanterre: vers un 'modus vivendi'?" *Le Monde* 2 April 1968



Nanterre were ransacked.<sup>80</sup> In response, Occident broke into the CVN's headquarters in Paris while most members were out at a protest, attacking the eight members on duty there before setting fire to the office.<sup>81</sup> Finally, a group of Maoist student activists, motivated in part by Occident's destruction of the Maoist Michelet bookstore and also by Occident's continual attacks on students, ransacked an art exhibit set up by the Front Uni du Vietnam, sneaking in, overpowering those on guard and beating Roger Holeindre severely.<sup>82</sup> Occident vowed revenge.<sup>83</sup>

Right and left-wing violence added a more drastic dimension to the ongoing student protests. After the attack on CVN headquarters, the group's leaders had urged its members to "protect themselves;" it was advice that few took lightly.<sup>84</sup> Nanterre's campus closing came about in part because of the dean's well-justified fear of bloody fights breaking out. Prior to the closings, Occident had called for its own protest to go on at Nanterre during already planned "anti-imperialist days." They did not envision a series of lectures; their militants were armed with iron bars and Molotov cocktails. Left-wing groups knew their intent, and were similarly armed; furthermore, since they controlled most of the buildings and the roofs, had set up slingshots and even improvised

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<sup>80</sup> "A l'assemblée générale de l'UNEF, bagarre entre étudiants de droite et de gauche," *Le Monde* 23 April 1968; Charpier, *Génération Occident*, 151.

<sup>81</sup> Charpier, *ibid*; "Le local du comité Vietnam national a été attaqué par des militants d'Occident," *Le Monde* 24 April 1968.

<sup>82</sup> "Au Quartier Latin une exposition organisée par l'Association de soutien au Sud-Vietnam est saccagée," *Le Monde* 30 April 1968

<sup>83</sup> Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Plon, 1996), 87-88

<sup>84</sup> "Le local du comité Vietnam national a été attaqué par des militants d'Occident," *Le Monde* 24 April 1968.

catapults.<sup>85</sup> It was preparation for a bloody battle whose lines had been drawn during clashes over Vietnam, and by extension over the University and France, in the preceding months.

With Nanterre closed, action moved to the Sorbonne and all three elements - Vietnam, left wing students and Occident - exploded. On May 3rd, Richard Perrin, an American deserter and activist against the war living in Paris, received an invitation to come to the Sorbonne. He was told students from Nanterre would be there to discuss "the problems on their campus." A frequent speaker on Vietnam at leftist meetings, Perrin accepted without a second thought, but upon arriving at the Sorbonne found the students locked out and was told he would not be able to speak. "Before I could leave," he remembered, "a group of right-wing students gathered outside. It wasn't safe to pass through a bunch like that. They called themselves Occident and were well known for their violent behavior. I thought I'd better wait for things to cool down." The trouble was, he ruefully remarked, "it took several weeks for things to cool down."<sup>86</sup> Students inside the Sorbonne, working from past experience of encounters with Occident, began breaking chairs apart to arm themselves. Shortly thereafter, the police showed up within the Sorbonne interior, loaded some students into their paddy wagons, and May '68 began in earnest.

### **Conclusions: The Importance of Vietnam**

Including Vietnam protests in the history of May '68 is not meant to take away from the other aspects which informed its development. Without problems within the

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<sup>85</sup> Charpier, *Génération Occident*, 153.

<sup>86</sup> Dick Perrin with Tim McCarthy, *G.I. Resister: The Story of How One American Soldier and his Family Fought the War in Vietnam* (Victoria: Trafford, 2001): 7.

French university system, Gaullist distance from reality, or a growing malaise with capitalist society, May '68 would certainly not have happened. But without protests over the Vietnam War, May '68 would not have existed as it did. Conflicts within left-wing groups established the division between old and young, between political and direct action, and between leftists and the Communist Party which would influence group relations and youth actions at the start of May '68. Constant clashes between the right and the left created the tensions and expectations of violence which caused May '68 to explode as it did on May 3rd, and helped to frame it as a conflict over the direction of France itself. Finally, the Vietnam War protests, especially through the tumult surrounding the arrests of militants on March 22nd, provided the language which moved the students protests from France-specific concerns to part of a larger anti-imperialist fight. Their power was such that Laurent Schwartz, looking back, remarked "I lived May '68 several months before May '68."<sup>87</sup>

Viansson-Ponté remained correct in his assessment that the war only really mattered to a small group of people, but incorrect in his assumption of how these activists would play into the revolution he foresaw happening. More than just a diversion, more than a fringe movement, activists involved in the Vietnam War on the left and on the right lay at the heart of the development of May '68. In fact, the importance of small groups of young people had even been noted at the time. *Rivarol* noted that while the student groups might make up less than a percent of the electorate, they were still significant. "While [they] can't do anything in normal times, their appearance shows that times are not normal; they predict the criminal madness of great revolutions [...]. To

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<sup>87</sup> Schwartz, *A Mathematician*, 399.

ignore them is to be blind to the signs of the times."<sup>88</sup> And as a sociologist explained to *Paris Presse*, "Public powers have always denied the importance, or at least the significance of student protests. They forget two things: the first is that tomorrow's power belongs to today's students. The second is that, if students have never caused a revolution alone, revolutions have rarely happened without them."<sup>89</sup> For these student groups in France in the early months of 1968, their activity and their power came in large part from the importance of the Vietnam War to their groups. These protests moved them and France forward in an tumultuous way that, contradictory to Viansson-Ponté's claims, meant that the country was at risk for anything but "dying of boredom."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Marcel Signac, "Que prépare-t-on à la Sorbonne? La licence ou la guérilla?" *Rivarol* February 15 1968.

<sup>89</sup> Claude Sales "A travers le monde, les étudiants en colère mêlent les problèmes politiques et universitaires," *France-Soir*, 24 February 1968.

<sup>90</sup> Pierre Viannson-Ponté, "Quand la France s'ennuie," *Le Monde* February 15 1968.

## **Chapter Seven:**

### ***The Retour à l'Hexagone:* May '68 and the Decline of the Vietnam War Movement in France**

At 2:15 in the morning on May 11th, the French police finally made their move. Hurling tear gas grenades and brandishing billy clubs, they launched themselves at the makeshift barricades of overturned cars and uprooted trees erected by Parisian students throughout the Latin Quarter. Vicious fighting followed, with smoke and tear gas so thick that "in some places only those with flashlights could grope their way into combat." The New York Times described a scene resembling a battlefield: "Ambulances raced to and from the scene with wounded from both sides," Lloyd Garrison reported. "Red Cross stretcher bearers braved rocks and tear gas grenades to retrieve casualties between the barricades and phalanxes of charging French security forces [...] Countless wounded students laying crying for help behind burning barricades[.]"<sup>1</sup> When the air finally cleared at six in the morning, thousands had been injured and over four hundred arrested. The remnants of still-smoking barricades, burned by the students as they retreated, littered the streets.

Ironically, the Parisian war zone had arisen in part from a desire to make peace. Only days before, Paris had been chosen as the site for negotiations between the North Vietnamese and the United States. Honored by their city's selection, Parisian leaders worried that the student unrest would cause harm even as they assured American and

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Garrison, "Policement in Paris Storm Student-Held Barricades," *New York Times* 11 May 1968.

North Vietnamese leaders that nothing would affect the talks. As delegations from both countries began to arrive, government officials called upon protestors to protect Paris' reputation as a city of peace. A city councilman proclaimed that it was "inadmissible that a handful of agitators [...] are giving way to acts of violence" at the exact moment when "Paris was seeing its vocation as the capital of peace consecrated."<sup>2</sup> The order to remove the barricades came after long discussions among officials inspired by the government's desire to keep the peace talks safe. The wish to protect the talks was so strong that in addition to sending in the troops which stormed the Latin Quarter, the government stationed police at nineteen different bridges over the Seine to insure that demonstrators could not reach the Right Bank and trouble the delegates.<sup>3</sup> But the efforts to protect the talks did not stop the students from protesting, and despite the presence of peace negotiators on the other side of the river, battles raged on in Paris throughout May. The fighting became so bad on the Left Bank that the North Vietnamese delegation left their hotel located near the Latin Quarter to move to quarters in the suburbs, commenting, "The noise reminded us of the bombing of Hanoi."<sup>4</sup> As clashes approached epic proportions and workers joined forces with the students, it seemed the Gaullist government might fall. "Somewhere in Paris peace is hidden," Parisian resident Michelle Merlanger commented to a reporter. "I am afraid the Americans and the Vietnamese will find it before the French students do."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Chiens de garde," *Action* 7 May 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd Garrison, "Policement in Paris Storm Student-Held Barricades," *New York Times* 11 May 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Lewis, "French Tumult is Background for Vietnam Parley," *New York Times* 22 May 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Tanner, "Students and Gaullism: Use of Force to Crush Paris Revolt Has Weakened the Regime's Position," *New York Times* 14 May 1968.

While there were many unexpected facets to the May uprisings, perhaps one of the most surprising is that, despite the presence of Vietnam War talks in Paris, French activists were not aiming their vitriol at the negotiations. Indeed no one attempted to protest the delegations or interfere with negotiations. In fact, the meteoric rise of May '68 events coincided with the precipitous decline of French interest in the Vietnam War. This *retour à l'Hexagone* [return to the Hexagon, a reference to the outline shape of France], characterized by an intense focus on French-related events, seemed to indicate that the French had finally arrived at a point of interest to them again after a period of working in others' affairs since the end of the Algerian War. Yet in reality, the Vietnam War had provided key motivation for the French to arrive at '68 and continued to influence their self-understanding once events became more exciting at home. In this concluding chapter, I will analyze the apparent French loss of interest in the Vietnam War, looking at evolutions in activism for de Gaulle, the right, and the left, throughout the events of May '68 and in their aftermath. I show that rather than a simple decline of interest, the changing attitudes towards the Vietnam War after May demonstrate the culmination of reconceptualizations of French national identity, arising from the combination of domestic events and international interactions. Although the Vietnam War was not as omni-present after '68 as it had been before, it remained an important international factor of the supposed return to the homefront of the late 60s and early 70s.

### **From "The Cement and the Origin" to Afterthought: Shifts for the Vietnam War during May '68**

At the start of May, Vietnam still remained important to the uprising. As late as May 10th, the CVN was still distributing tracts among the students urging them to participate in their "anti-imperialist summer," which took place in Cuba and focused on

Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> Students at Nanterre on May 2nd who invaded and occupied an amphitheatre wanted the room in part to show Vietnam War films to their comrades.<sup>7</sup> During the interminable discussions at Nanterre early on, students proudly proclaimed "We refuse the right to speak to anyone who supports [the American] intervention in Vietnam," thus making alignment on the Vietnam War a precondition for participation in the May movement. *Le Monde* referred to anti-war protests as "the cement and the origin" of May.<sup>8</sup> Students also rejected government attempts to quell their uprising in order to let the peace talks proceed smoothly. Underlining again the left's unwillingness to allow the government's stance on Vietnam to color the rest of the government's policy, the students noted that "Those who imagine that this regime will be pardoned for everything because conversations on Vietnam are taking place in Paris are mistaken. We're not in the business of handing out indulgences."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they challenged the Gaullist presentation of Paris as the "capital of peace" and a neutral spot in which negotiations could take place. "The portraits of Ho Chi Minh on the barricades and the NLF flags in protests show clearly that for us, Paris is not a neutral town in the Vietnam War," the students proclaimed.<sup>10</sup> They linked their attempted takeover of the city to support of the North Vietnamese revolutionaries.

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<sup>6</sup> No title, 10 May 1968, BNF, Collection "Tracts de Mai 68," Tract 4622

<sup>7</sup> "Des étudiants 'révolutionnaires' envahissent les locaux administratifs et interdisent à un professeur de faire son cours," *Le Figaro* 3 May 1968.

<sup>8</sup> BGA, "Les étudiants entre l'apathie et la violence," *Le Monde* 7 May 1968.

<sup>9</sup> "Les enfants de Marx," *Action* 13 May 1968. *Action* was a student produced newspaper first published during May.

<sup>10</sup> "Une autre idée de Pompidou," *Action* 13 May 1968.



Even those who denigrated the students' actions at the beginning tended to do so in the context of the Vietnam War. The agency France-Presse published a report that the government "saw in the Latin Quarter protests [of May 10th] the intervention of forces hostile to peace" who were attempting to derail the peace talks in Paris.<sup>11</sup> *Figaro* also wondered where the "so-called professional agitators" had come from, and argued that "the first response one thinks of is that the Chinese, or the pro-Chinese, are at work in the wings. They are the only ones we can think of who, at the present time, would wish to trouble the atmosphere of the conversation taking place between North Vietnam and the U.S. in the hope of peace." The paper noted that "some protestors invoked the name of Mao Tse-Tong on their banners." Although the paper's emphasis was on unmasking "professional" and possibly foreign agitators, the belief still came through that reactions to the Vietnam motivated those acting. By including Chinese and pro-Chinese, *Figaro* allowed for the homegrown Maoist element among the leaders. The insinuation subordinated the French interests the students expressed in favor of the larger international issue of the Vietnam War.<sup>12</sup>

Casting their net more widely, *Rivarol* at the start of May saw a panoply of communists at work on the streets of Paris, but still with the same end aim in mind. Pierre Dominique (who usually covered the paper's Southeast Asia beat) claimed that the students -- "and there were not only students; among those arrested, half of them were foreigners" -- had fought like "professionals, not of literature and sciences, but of what we call revolution[.]" He saw their May 6th protest as internationally inspired and led:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> André François-Poncet, "Jeunesse Rebelle," *Le Figaro* 13 May 1968.

"They marched behind the red flag, singing the "International;" 10,000 of them cheered for the Vietcong, Monday night, including in their ranks 2000 pro-Chinese organized and trained in street fighting, who destroyed everything they could destroy[.]" Unsure whether their leaders came from Peking or Germany (a nod to student leader's Daniel Cohn-Bendit's origins), Dominique insisted nevertheless that the goal of the protest was to show that the Latin Quarter supported the North Vietnamese.<sup>13</sup> By *Rivarol*'s next issue, the paper was convinced that the protests existed solely for the purpose of disrupting the talks. "We don't at all contest (the word is stylish nowadays) that you can find, among the night street walkers, a majority of youths and adolescents concerned about the future awaiting them," the editorial board noted. "But [...] we declare that THE ENTIRETY OF OPERATIONS HAS BEEN CONCEIVED AND CARRIED OUT BY PROFESSIONAL AGITATORS WHO COULD CARE LESS ABOUT THE FRENCH UNIVERSITY." Offering up a plethora of possible sources, from "representants of the German SDS (Rudi Dutschke), Trotskyists, Spanish anarchists, 'Chinese,' 'Cubans,' or other fellagha," the paper insisted that "the 'student unrest' has only been a magnificent pretext for starting an insurrection in Paris, AT THE EXACT MOMENT WHEN THE AMERICAN-NORTH VIETNAMESE TALKS WERE ABOUT TO BEGIN."<sup>14</sup> As far as *Rivarol* was concerned at this point, the protestors' proclaimed domestic concerns only masked an international-based communist action.

Yet even before Occident's small counter-protest on the 13th, where a handful of militants broke off and stoned the Chinese embassy while shouting "Vietcongs,

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Dominique, "Au lendemain d'une émeute," *Rivarol* 9 May 1968.

<sup>14</sup> Editorial, "L'action des 'étudiants en colère' se situe dans le droit fil des fastes libératoires," *Rivarol* 16 May 1968.

assassins!," it had become clear that Vietnam was slipping in importance.<sup>15</sup> The change of focus came about for two reasons: first, the fear of police repercussion; and second, a reconceptualization of French issues as part of a challenge to imperialism. Worries of how the government might react blocked the only May call for a protest aimed at the peace talks. In a May 9th flyer entitled "The Vietnamese people will win!," the *Comités Vietnam de base* had exhorted the French to come out in mass to support the Vietnamese. Ignoring the French student uprisings entirely, the original call raved about the progress the Vietnamese had made, depicted the Americans as fearful and about to lose, and insisted --in all caps -- that all "SINCERE FRIENDS" of the Vietnamese should demonstrate in front of the North Vietnamese delegations' quarters to show their "SUPPORT AND THEIR COMPLETE SOLIDARITY."<sup>16</sup> Yet shortly after, the CVBs called off the protest. Explaining that their "intention, entirely just, [was] to demonstrate our warm support, our unconditional support to our Vietnamese comrades," the CVBs noted that nevertheless "the situation in Paris has notably evolved since we took this decision." Since the government was dropping hints about professionals aiming to disrupt the talks, the CVBs did not want to give them the excuse to act. "A protest in front of the Lutetia would without a doubt be repressed with extreme violence," the CVBs admitted. Conceding it would be "reckless" to demonstrate, the CVBs acknowledged that the police could have used a protest aimed at the talks as a way of "'justify[ing]' the violence of recent days, [and] try[ing] to intimidate, to decapitate, and to crush the anti-imperialist movement in France." The risk was not worth it, the CVBs decided: "In this

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<sup>15</sup> "En réplique à la soirée du 7 mai, manifestation de jeunes nationalistes de l'Etoile à l'Alma," *Le Monde* 15 May 1968.

<sup>16</sup> "Le peuple vietnamien vaincra!" BNF Tract 4602.

confrontation, where we would not have the full initiative, we would without a doubt have more to lose than to gain and we would be mistaken to let ourselves get caught in this *grossière* trap."<sup>17</sup> Rather than give the French government an excuse to act, and a reason to justify its suspicions about the movement, the CVBs cancelled the protest. No others were planned. In fact, groups went out of their way to specify that their attacks on the French system were not going to disrupt the Vietnamese talks: when the workers finally joined up with the students in mid-May, launching a 24 hour strike which threatened to shut down Paris, protest organizers planned a marching route that did not approach the location of the talks at all.<sup>18</sup> Repression at home kept from a direct link-up with revolutionaries from abroad.

Yet the return to the Hexagon came from more than just fear of police reprisals. More significantly, it came from a new perception of the value of French-based protests. The foregrounding of French issues appeared as early as the start of May, when Laurent Schwartz found himself under attack when he attempted to address students at Nanterre. Co-founder of the Comité Vietnam National, long-time fighter against imperialism abroad, Schwartz earned the students' ire because he favored selective, rather than comprehensive, French university admission policies<sup>19</sup>. In trying to block him from

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<sup>17</sup> "La manifestation de dimanche 12 mai est [unclear]," BNF Tract 4603.

<sup>18</sup> John L. Hess, "A General Strike to Back Students Starts in France. Some Universities Invaded -- Pompidou Pledges to Act on Major Grievances," *New York Times* 13 May 1968.

<sup>19</sup> At the time, any student who successfully passed the *baccalaureat*, the French high school terminal exam, could continue to college. When the baby-boom generation came of age, this resulted in massive overcrowding of the French university system. Schwartz favored an admissions process similar to the one used in the United States. Although the students reproached him at Nanterre, he remained solidly in support of their uprising, and was one of the first professors to offer his resignation as protest against the violent police repressions of the students. Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The French Student Uprising: November 1967 - June 1968: An Analytical Record*, trans. Maria Jolas ( Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 204 n20.

speaking, a student militant told others present that "the selectionist Laurent Schwartz is not part of the working class." Student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit had to step in to calm the students, but he did not do so by reminding them of Schwartz' long history fighting for the left. Rather, he invoked free speech and the students' right to judge after hearing, Cohn-Bendit yelled "Laurent Schwartz must be able to express himself," and bargained with the students that after he spoke, they could politically reprimand him. "If then [after he's spoken] we determine that he's a bastard," Cohn-Bendit reasoned, "we'll tell him: Monsieur Schwartz, you're a bastard."<sup>20</sup> Faced with students concerned with French issues and focused on the revolutionary possibilities of the French working class, Laurent Schwartz's Vietnam War activism did not offer enough anti-imperialist capital to counter his perceived bourgeois conceptualizations of French society.

The Schwartz action reflected a larger trend: participants in May viewed their actions as a continuation of, and on par with, anti-imperialist actions elsewhere, including in Vietnam. In its first issue, the student paper *Action* declared that "In Paris and at Nanterre, they are not fighting alone; they are not fighting for themselves. [...] Those who fight against the capitalist university have found themselves at the side of those who fight against capitalist exploitation." The French fight, they argued, sympathized with the Vietnamese struggle and directly challenged the workings of the capitalist system. "Today, students are aware of what they want to make of them: cogs in an existing system, paid to make it work its best," *Action* wrote. "Their battle concerns all of the workers because it is the workers' fight[.]"<sup>21</sup> Leftists belonging to the Fourth International

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<sup>20</sup> Frédéric Gaussen et Guy Herzlich, "Les Etudiants entre l'apathie et la Violence: I: Le rêve de Nanterre," *Le Monde* 7 May 1968.

<sup>21</sup> "Pourquoi nous nous battons," *Action* 7 May 1968.

argued that "[t]he students' struggle is placed naturally in the context of struggles which are going on across the entire world." They placed the French students on the same level as American students fighting against the Vietnam war, of Europeans "in solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution, in solidarity with the struggles of all colonized people fighting for their emancipation," and with students fighting for the installation of socialist regimes in their world. "The students' struggle across the whole world is under the sign of Che Guevara's fight," the Fourth International noted, "and is an integral part of the fight for the socialist revolution."<sup>22</sup> No longer secondary to the Vietnamese rebels, the French students could consider themselves on the frontlines of the fight against imperialism.

The members of the French Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire took this argument for the importance of the students' fight and used it to argue for a need to focus on French issues and push for a French proletarian revolution, while additionally chastising the French Maoists who had made up the CVBs. "Being content with saying that only the proletariat can lead the fight to the end, is the same as being happy with a theoretical abstraction in a situation where we have a concrete problem to solve," they stated. They claimed the time had come for French students to begin acting on their own problems and leading their own fight against capitalism, rather than waiting for others to show the way. "In the same way that it was stupid to put one's self at the service of the Vietnamese because the Vietnamese can't judge in our place on the possibilities of our actions," the JCR argued, "it would also be criminal for the avant-garde to put the students in the workers' service instead of using the student movement as a political

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<sup>22</sup> "Les Étudiants Montrent la Voie" Supp au N29 de "La Quatrieme Internationale". BDIC F delta 1061/4

*révélateur* for society as a whole."<sup>23</sup> The last gasp of the battle between the CVN and the CVBs (the Maoist leadership had, due to their theories of revolution, not supported the May uprisings, although the grassroots training they had offered provided much of the organizing push for May participants), the commentary also emphasized the need for the French to look home if they wanted to make a difference.

By the end of May, the Vietnam War came in a distant second in the minds of French activists. When international students at the Cité dormitories occupied their quarters and showed Vietnam War films, they did so not to instruct, but to demonstrate their solidarity with, the French.<sup>24</sup> Although the CVN called for a meeting about the talks on May 27th, it had difficulty interesting participants. "Habitants of the quartier, most of you supported the students against police repression; most of you supported the Vietnamese in their struggle for independence," the CVN stated in a phrasing which attempted to link the two struggles together and remind activists of their former interests. "Peace has not yet been gained," they wrote, "the US has not yet given in to the demands of the Vietnamese. THESE PEOPLE STILL NEED YOUR SUPPORT."<sup>25</sup> But, as a *New York Times* article showed, the world of the peace talks and the world of May seemed miles apart. Writing on May 22nd, Anthony Lewis contrasted a Sorbonne amphitheater full of "students in shirtsleeves wav[ing] their fists and shouting their ideas [...] look[ing] like a mural of 1789 come to life," with the "caviar and champagne passed among the guests at a diplomatic reception" given by the North Vietnamese at the Hotel Lutetia.

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<sup>23</sup> "Luttes étudiantes, luttes ouvrières," *Avant Garde Jeunesse*, supplement to N12, 18 May 1968.

<sup>24</sup> "Deux nouveaux pavillons 'occupés' à la Cité universitaire de Paris," *Le Monde* 2-3 June 1968.

<sup>25</sup> "La Sale Guerre" N Special: Comité Vietnam National. No date, May 1968, BNF 4- JO- 23906.

Noting that the bourgeois activities of the talks seemed like a "stylized shadow play" against the backdrop of chaos in France, Lewis remarked that the students were "tangible forces for change. For all the reality on the battlefields of Vietnam and the importance of these talks, the formalities of the diplomatic process strike an artificial blow."<sup>26</sup> The diplomatic niceties of the talks, combined with, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet later put it, the general sentiment of "let's first settle our own problems," meant that Vietnam received little attention.<sup>27</sup>

The changing view carried over into the opposition as well: in its May 23rd issue, *Rivarol* did not mention the peace talks, focusing instead on France. And whereas they had earlier insinuated either German or Chinese agents could be involved in leading the protests, they now placed Cohn-Bendit firmly under the tutelage of East German Communist Walter Ulbricht, a move which, while still insinuating the dangers of foreign infiltration, directed worries back to the European continent and away from the Vietnam War.<sup>28</sup> Occident, encouraging students to join it around May 20th, now situated the threat to the west squarely within France. "Students, don't let your future be decided by salon-style terrorists on a break from their campuses!," the group exclaimed. "If tomorrow France became a popular democracy, there would no longer be any issue of reform or of contestation. You would only be able to bend to the will of political commissaries[.]"<sup>29</sup> As May slid into June and the protests gradually ended, the French interest on Vietnam became switched for a focus on France.

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<sup>26</sup> Anthony Lewis, "French Tumult is Background for Vietnam Parley," *New York Times* 22 May 1968.

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "Introduction: Outline of a Revolution," *The French Student Uprising*, 46-47.

<sup>28</sup> *Rivarol* 23 May 1968.

<sup>29</sup> "Que veut Occident?" dated May 20, 1968, BNF Tract 6835.



### **"Signs of Goodwill:" Changes in French Government Policies After May**

In the aftermath of May, the most visible signs of changed attitudes came from the French government, in a form of a crackdown on dissent. The first move came in early June, when de Gaulle banned seven student organizations at the heart of the May events. The groups included two which had played a central role in Vietnam War protests: the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire, a Trotskyist groups connected to the CVN, and the Union des jeunesses communistes (marxiste-lenistes), a Maoist group heavily involved in the CVBs. Although not aiming at Vietnam War activities specifically, de Gaulle's ban had serious ramifications on the anti-war movement. The dissolution of these student groups removed some of the internal structures which had helped organize militants and reduced the number of participants available to protest. Moreover, it once again directed activists' energy back on France, by giving them a clear enemy to challenge on the homefront. The move did not reduce the groups' members' political activism -- Alain Krivine, head of the JCR, would run for president of France in 1969 -- but it did strongly refocus their activities.

But de Gaulle's newfound conservatism extended beyond a simple desire to re-establish order after the chaos of May, and ventured into the realms of foreign policy as well. Through actions specifically aimed at curtailing Vietnamese War protests in France, he set about mending fences with the United States and solidifying France's identity as "the capital of peace." This time, he aimed his measures not only at French students, but at their American counterparts at work in Paris: American expatriate activists, and American military deserters and resisters.

The government first went after anti-war protesters in France. Justifying their actions through a desire to keep Paris neutral, as well as a fear of Maoists and Trotskyists attempting to turn demonstrations into armed uprisings, the Ministers' Council banned all public street anti-Vietnam War protests on June 12, 1968. The United States greeted the move as a "sign of French government good-will towards the United States."<sup>30</sup> Although the government announced the ban too late to stop a planned *Mouvement de la Paix* protest for the Geneva Accords anniversary in July, officials were able to limit the extent of the protest and its content, greatly offending the Communist Party. Other groups similarly found their protest efforts stymied. When several French activists attempted to set up a meeting for American Professor Richard Falk to speak on his views that U.S. efforts in Vietnam constituted genocide, the Foreign Affairs Ministry at the Quai d'Orsay spoke out against it, emphasizing the French government's "concern of maintaining an atmosphere of calm and objectivity around the Paris negotiations."<sup>31</sup> When protestors challenged the ban of a large-scale protest on November 15, 1969, the government reacted sharply, sending in police forces to break up the demonstration, and rounding up over 2000 for questioning. The severity of the government's action caused activists to complain about "Franco-American collusion" and to point out that de Gaulle was suppressing protests against the United States to a greater extent than Nixon himself was.<sup>32</sup> While after the November 1969 protest the government let up a bit in its repression, it still reserved the right to ban certain materials, such as films, from being

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<sup>30</sup> Journoud, 1157.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

shown. In a direct contrast to pre-May treatment of protestors, such as Vice President Humphrey's visit, the government was no longer allowing activists to demonstrate in a way that made the United States uncomfortable or directly contradicted the French government's stance on the war.

Further hardening its stance, the French government also went after two groups of American citizens involved with protests in France: PACS, the Paris American Committee to Stopwar; and American military deserters. Formed in 1966, PACS provided, as Pierre Journoud has noted, the "join-up between French and American protest groups." Consisting of a mix of academics (Harvey Goldberg, H. Bruce Franklin) and members of the literary scene (well-known translator Maria Jolas, novelist Ira Morris, journalist Scholfield Coryell), all expatriate Americans, the group offered multiple information sessions about the war and about anti-war protest activities in the States and in France.<sup>33</sup> They invited speakers from the U.S., as well as from French organizations such as the Russell Tribunal. PACS participated in multiple protests in France, generally working with the CVN. The group did not fly under the government's radar: during protests against Vice President Humphrey, Stanford professor H. Bruce Franklin was arrested and, while in jail, discovered that their group had been infiltrated, with French collusion, by the CIA.<sup>34</sup> But while the French government had allowed this, it never interfered with PACS's activities until after May '68.

Although PACS had not been involved in the May uprisings, the group suffered the consequences of newly strict government policies in their aftermath. After a July 4th

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 1114-1115.

<sup>34</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, *Back Where You Came From: A Life in the Death of an Empire* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1975), 184

meeting under the title "And Now, Independence for Vietnam," PACS decided to organize a larger protest in conjunction with a French group, the Association Médicale franco-vietnamienne (AMFV) and the International Center Against War Crimes, both of which had emerged from Russell Tribunal activities.<sup>35</sup> But the government quickly moved to ban the meeting, proclaiming it risked "disturbing public order."<sup>36</sup> Inside sources told *Le Monde* officials had blocked the protest because its "public character" was "incompatible [...] with the currently ongoing international conversations in Paris." (The paper pointed out, however, that a recent meeting in favor of South Vietnam had been allowed to proceed without problems.)<sup>37</sup> Groups involved quickly cried foul. The International Center dismissing the claim of "disturbing public order" as "grotesque." Believing instead the government's motivation arose from "external diplomatic pressures that we can imagine," the Center saw the move as "indefensible" and urged Frenchmen to sit up and notice the "attacks on political liberties" resulting from recent dangerous shift in governmental policies.<sup>38</sup> The Communist Mouvement de la Paix also spoke out, refusing to admit that the peace talks' location justified closing off protest meetings. "The choice of Paris as the place for negotiations should not mean, in any sense, that we should give up actions in the Capital centered around ending U.S. aggression in Vietnam," the MDLP argued. "It means to the contrary an intense activity of all pacifist forces[.]"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 25 July 1968.

<sup>36</sup> "Une réunion d'information sur le Vietnam est interdite à Paris," *Le Monde* 27 July 1968.

<sup>37</sup> "Précisions sur l'interdiction à Paris d'une réunion consacrée au Vietnam," *Le Monde* 28-29 July 1968.

<sup>38</sup> "Une réunion d'information sur le Vietnam est interdite à Paris," *Le Monde* 27 July 1968.

<sup>39</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 30 July 1968.

The protests fell on deaf ears, however. On August 9th, police called PACS member Scholfield Coryell to the préfecture and revoked his visa, claiming he was involved with activities "of the sort to disturb public order."<sup>40</sup> On August 19th, the ministerial order came down to dissolve PACS. Seen by the International Center as "proof of the evolution of the government's international views," the moves against PACS showed that the French government had become less tolerant of anti-war activists and more concerned about the U.S.<sup>41</sup> French militant Jean Chesneaux informed his friend Ira Morris that the developments were the result of de Gaulle's momentary loss of control in '68: now concerned over his power, he had stopped pushing against the United States and started trying to re-establish himself within their circle.<sup>42</sup> The revolutionary-supporting France of earlier days, standing up to American hegemony, seemed to be gone.

No move more clearly defined the shift towards more positive relations with the United States than the drastic change after '68 in France's toleration of American deserters and resisters. Since American soldiers had begun appearing in France in 1967, helped into the country by French sympathizers, the French government had adopted a fairly liberal policy towards them.<sup>43</sup> International agreements under NATO meant that, upon learning of an AWOL American soldier's presence in France, the French

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<sup>40</sup> "Expulsion d'un journaliste américain de Paris," *Le Monde* 11-12 August 1968.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Journoud, 1153.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

government was obliged to return him to the proper authorities.<sup>44</sup> But when French police arrested Louis Armsfield, a young African American, in May of 1967, the government did not follow policy. Charging Armsfield with *vagabondage*, police kept him imprisoned rather than handing him to NATO official in Belgium, while the French government debated his demand for political asylum.<sup>45</sup> In the end, after a brief stay in jail for the *vagabondage* crime, French authorities denied Armstrong's political asylum request but granted him a residency permit, which allowed him to legally stay in France on the condition he find employment and renew his permit every few months.<sup>46</sup> Other resisters and deserters, including some like Richard Perrin of the well-known dissident group RITA (Resisters in the Army), quickly followed suit and obtained their residency permits.<sup>47</sup> They found the French extremely welcoming. Perrin remarked that "I don't recall ever meeting a French person who was critical of the stand I was taking."<sup>48</sup> By March 1968, the French authorities had granted residency permits to 25 American soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

Permission to stay in France came with a warning to "stay out of politics," but many soldiers remained active in anti-war activities. As Richard Perrin explained it, ". I chose to interpret [the warning] to mean I should stay out of French politics, not

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<sup>44</sup> "Interpellé à Paris, un déserteur américain opposé à la guerre du Vietnam serait relâché," *Le Monde* 10 May 1967.

<sup>45</sup> No title, *Le Monde* 18 May 1967.

<sup>46</sup> "L'affaire Armsfield: Le jeune déserteur américain a obtenu un permis de séjour temporaire en France," *Le Monde* 21-22 May 1967.

<sup>47</sup> Perrin, *GI Resister*, 71-2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>49</sup> "Opposants à la guerre du Vietnam, trois nouveaux déserteurs américains sont arrivés à Paris," *Le Monde* 14 March 1968.

American politics. So I was itching to get involved again."<sup>50</sup> Perrin and his colleagues used their French location to launch RITA, sending out newsletters, contacting sympathizers still inside the army, and coordinating movement of dissident troops.<sup>51</sup> In December 1967, he held a news conference with Stokely Carmichael, in town for the Che Guevara Week organized by the CVN. (Worried about upsetting French authorities, Perrin specifically limited media invitations to American outlets.)<sup>52</sup> French protest groups became interested in their plight and, in early 1968, four organizations -- the CVN, the Collective Intersyndical Universitaire, the Movement Against Atomic Arms and the Mouvement de la Paix -- held a meeting where three resisters requested "material aid" for their counterparts in France.<sup>53</sup> The four organizations established a fund for any donations offered and a network through which French citizens could offer lodging or work.<sup>54</sup> In April, the joint French-American work grew bolder, when, during a meeting presided by Alfred Kastler and Jean-Paul Sartre, eight American soldiers handed over their draft cards to be mailed to draft director General Hershey. They then formed a "Union of Resisters and Deserters in France" to better work together.<sup>55</sup> The continued political work finally upset the French officials, who had decided in March 1968 that American soldiers "were being used for agitation." On April 2, the Minister of the

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<sup>50</sup> Perrin, *GI Resister*, 74.

<sup>51</sup> Perrin, *GI Resister*, 83.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>53</sup> "Un appel des déserteurs et insoumis américains réfugiés en France," *Le Monde* 24 February 1967.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*; No title, *Vietnam* March 1968.

<sup>55</sup> "La 'résistance américaine' en France," *Le Monde* 13 April 1968.

Interior directed his subordinated to have all politically-active resisters or deserters deported.

Despite this, Perrin and his counterparts experienced no difficulties until the summer, at which point, as Pierre Journoud has pointed out, "the conjunction between the events of May '68 and the opening of the Paris Peace Talks [permitted] the Ministry of the Interior's services to make their more repressive measures more concrete."<sup>56</sup> During the May 6th protest, American resister Warren Hamerman was among a "group of foreign tourists" who ended up on the wrong end of a CRS police baton. When the police later learned of his presence at the protest, they took advantage of his routine permit renewal visit to search him. Finding a notebook of anti-war organizations, they told him he had fifteen days to find a job or leave the country. They then proceeded to tail him around Paris as he looked for work, until he finally left of his own accord. Another deserter, Alfred Schmidt, claimed to have made the mistake of asking the CRS for directions on how to get out of the May 6th protest, and was promptly arrested. He too was told to leave France.<sup>57</sup> Richard Perrin departed as well. He recalled that "Any foreigner engaging, or even appearing to engage in political activity the French government didn't like was deported." Each time he went to renew his permit, the interrogation over his work and political activities lasted longer, until he finally felt so uncomfortable he left the country.<sup>58</sup> The infrastructure of RITA in France was broken.

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<sup>56</sup> Journoud, 1149.

<sup>57</sup> Tristan Mirand, "Insoumis: La résistance américaine à la guerre," *Tribune Socialiste* 10 October 1969.

<sup>58</sup> Perrin, *G.I. Resister*, 94-95.



In a letter to *Le Monde*, Alfred Schmidt and Warren Hamerman linked police reprisals against them to RITA members' decision to announce their support of the students on May 28th. But they also felt that the French government had always been hypocritical in accepting those who had left the army for political methods and yet then attempting to keep them from political activism once arrived. May, they felt, had only forced the contradiction to the forefront. "The French government and its police tried to have us accept silence as the price of our asylum; this was a price we were not willing to pay and that we will not pay," Schmidt and Hamerman wrote. "The time has come to make the situation clear. The time has come for the French government to state if it has decided to act in a way that reflects its declarations and its statements of faith on the Vietnam War."<sup>59</sup> But the government had shifted away from projecting a France at odds with American imperialism, to focusing on a France that was the locus of peace, and did not accept the soldiers' challenge.

### **The Awkward Situation of Americans in Paris: Changing Attitudes to American Deserters and Protestors**

The plight of American deserters and resisters did not go unnoticed. Some soldiers did accept the deal of silence for location and returned to France, where they often ended up hanging out with the "Beatniks" on the Left Bank, panhandling for cash. No longer of interest to the government since their political actions were quashed, they drew the sympathy of some of the luminaries on the left, who in 1969 formed the Association pour le soutien et la défense des Américains exilés (Association for the support and defense of exiled Americans). Containing such well-known activists as Jean-Paul Sartre, Laurent Schwartz, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Jean-Pierre Domenach and Nicole

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<sup>59</sup> "A propos des expulsions de déserteurs américains réfugiés en France," *Le Monde* 12 September 1968.

Dreyfus, the group attempted to gather funds and other aid for the former soldiers in need. But as Pierre Journoud states, "even with this relatively prestigious patronage committee, the theme of American exiles made little stir in public opinion, even in activist student circles."<sup>60</sup>

In general, activists after '68 lost focus on Vietnam. Occident, whose support of American troops came from their belief that Americans fought on the frontlines of the war against communism, now had a fight of their own at home. Despite the group's violent nature -- quite capable of "troubling public order" -- Occident escaped from the original June culling of radical student groups and was allowed to continue on until the next school year, when a series of violent attacks, including a raid on the SNESup offices, led to its dissolution.<sup>61</sup> Following their November 1st ban, the militants split into a number of different groups, most notably Nouvelle Droite and the even more violent Ordre Nouveau. The groups' targets remained the same -- at their formation meeting, Ordre Nouveau members called for Jean-Paul Sartre's head and proclaimed their desire to defend the West -- but their focus lay on France and Europe.<sup>62</sup> The Vietnam War, when it was mentioned by *Rivarol*, became an issue of foreign countries rather than one of foreign policies, no longer connected to France's own situation. By the time the right wing groups had unified under the Front National and Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972, their main concern lay with guaranteeing "France for the French" against the rising tide of North African immigrants. But although Vietnam had slipped from their main issues, the

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<sup>60</sup> Journoud, 1154.

<sup>61</sup> "Rue Monsieur le Prince: Le siège du SNESup attaqué," *Le Monde* 6-7 October 1968; Charpier, *Génération Occident* 172-173.

<sup>62</sup> Harvey G. Simmons, *The French National Front: The Extremist Challenge to Democracy*. Boulder: West View Press, 1996. 60-61

right's experiences in fighting about it, both ideologically and physically, provided the impetus to propel them forward into a unified group by demonstrating to them the political and militant tactics which worked and did not work.

While more interest in Vietnam remained on the left, similar changes had occurred. As the UNEF remarked, "In its passage through, May destroyed the permanent structures of anti-imperialist intervention."<sup>63</sup> The *Comités Vietnam de Base* took the strongest hit, being essentially "liquidated" (*fondue*) by the May events.<sup>64</sup> Although never formally dissolved, the groups ceased to exist after May. Part of the reason was, as Nicolas Pas has noted, that "the three slogans launched in spring 1967: "NLF will win!," "U.S. assassins!" and "McNamara Out!" had been, in the eyes of the militants of the time, more or less realized."<sup>65</sup> With the Tet Offensive victories and the start of peace talks, Maoists believed the Vietnamese had essentially guaranteed victory and the CVBs had nothing left to do. As one CVB militant, Antoinette Chauvenet, put it, "In a way, the Vietnam committees had fulfilled their aims, because negotiations had started."<sup>66</sup>

Yet the feeling that the Vietnamese no longer needed them was not the primary reason for the CVBs' disappearance. As Chauvenet also remarked: "And overall, something important was happening in France."<sup>67</sup> Beginning in May, Maoists turned their attention to the revolutionary potential of the French, primarily through their participation

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<sup>63</sup> J.D. Benard, "Note de Bureau aux membre du BN - Confidentielle (A ne pas laisser trainer)," no date but most likely 1969, BDIC F delta 1081/17

<sup>64</sup> Comité Vietnam de Jussieu, "Loin du Vietnam!," *Temps Modernes* 1975, 1203.

<sup>65</sup> Pas, "Sortir de l'Ombre du Parti Communiste Français."

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

in the *établissement* movement, wherein militants placed themselves within factories to try to radicalize the proletariat. Olivier Rolin, another CVB militant, remembered that "Our unique preoccupation as school opened in fall 1968 was to reconstitute the illegal, violent and proletarian movement, with the direct objective of urban guerilla warfare." Dismissing the CVBs as a *passé* part of the "intellectual youth," he said that "after May we were completely disinterested in Vietnam, except for a few short occasions. [...] Factories, it was factories for us: the priority of all priorities."<sup>68</sup> But even as the Maoists focused in on the French worker, Vietnam remained a reference point which allowed them to present their activity as part of a larger international revolutionary movement. A flyer for the famous occupation of the Lip factory in France proclaimed "VIETNAM: is not the endowment of the Vietnamese. In Franc-Comtoise language, you say 'Lip.'" In an interview, Lip organizer Ronguet noted the need to create "multiple Vietnams, the factory-Vietnam, the court-Vietnam, the police-Vietnam ... the Lip-Vietnam" in order to transition to the ideal society the Maoists envisioned. As he explained to his interviewer, "Vietnams should not be simply in factories [...] The day when there are enough Vietnams, when power relations are destroyed between the powerful and the governed, between the master and his students, between the priest and his congregation, that day, we will have fatally changed society."<sup>69</sup> The CVBs may have passed away and their militants might have left behind Vietnam War protests, but the Vietnam War still

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. The Maoist newspaper, *Cause du Peuple*, appeared among the groups supporting a few post-68 protests, but was not as heavily involved as other gauchiste groups. See for example the flyer "Nixon doit ceder!," 1972, BDIC F delta 151/62.

<sup>69</sup> "L'Imagination au pouvoir: les affiches de Lip," *Liberation* 10 August 1973.

infiltrated their means of conceptualizing the French self and elucidating the revolutionary societal identity they strived for in France.

The gauchistes' absence caused a void in Vietnam war activities that the French Communist Party was only too happy to fill. In the period after May, the PCF once again gained hegemony over anti-war protesting in France. It was not the only anti-war group to come through May -- the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire did as well -- but it was by far the most powerful, and it considered anti-war action as its "premiere [international] task."<sup>70</sup> The PCF served as the controlling head of a group of organizations, ranging in number from 41 to 52, which organized actions against the continued fighting in Vietnam. The majority of these groups were smaller Communist-led groups, such as the Union des femmes françaises, but frequently the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire and other non-Communist organizations also participated.<sup>71</sup> Protests reflected international developments, such as the invasion of Cambodia and Laos and the escalation of fighting in 1972, or the 1969 visit of newly-elected President Nixon to France. Rather than a call for political activism, however, the Communists tended to limit themselves to requests for support, expressions of disapproval of American actions, and, above all, for "material aid."<sup>72</sup> Through their constant organization of supply deliveries and other aid for the Vietnamese, the French Communist Party managed to stake out "an important role at the

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<sup>70</sup> Marc Lazar, "Le Parti communiste français et l'action de solidarité avec le Vietnam," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe*, 246.

<sup>71</sup> See for example the calls to protest on the following documents: "ASSEZ DE SANG ET DE SOUFFRANCES EN INDOCHINE," flyer, no date, apparently decembre 1972 (52 groups listed), ; "Mercredi 10 février à 18 h 30, tous à la manifestation du Châtelet à la Gare de l'Est," flyer, 1971, BDIC F delta 151 (41 groups listed); "10 Mai pour le Vietnam," no date, BDIC F delta 1081/17 (44 groups listed).

<sup>72</sup> François Blanchard, "Assemblée mondiale de paris pour la paix et l'indépendance des peuples d'indochine," flyer, no date, CAC 20000529 art 3; "Indochine: Une déclaration des 48 organisations: Une semaine d'action. Un bateau européen pour le Vietnam," flyer, 22 September 1972, CAC 20000529 art 3.

international level."<sup>73</sup> The Party not only set up drives for a variety of materials in France, they also intervened with the Soviets on behalf of the Vietnamese and attempted to spread information about the Vietnamese war to other third-world countries, notably in Africa.<sup>74</sup> Their work on these Vietnam-War related activities allowed the French Communist Party to establish the international identity for themselves they wanted for France: secondary to the USSR, but an essential link in a global network of socialist countries.

But although the PCF had taken control of French anti-war protests, and although the major gauchiste anti-war groups had fallen apart in May '68, the Communists still faced trouble on their left where Vietnam was concerned. It took time, however, for the far left to be able to truly trouble the PCF. Although the CVN had not disappeared as completely as the CVBs following May, its actions and the number of its activists were severely curtailed. Laurent Schwartz, who saw the CVN as "one of the frames of '68," remembered that former militants "had too much to do. They no longer worked for the CVN, they were all busy with actions in France. It was a slowing down, not at all a destruction[....]" He noted that the May participants sympathized with the anti-war movement, but "they no longer had time, that's all."<sup>75</sup> Reflecting on the changes, the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire -- who, after May '68, had lost the participation of

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<sup>73</sup> Marc Lazar, "Le Parti communiste français et l'action de solidarité avec le Vietnam," 247.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Nicolas Pas. Personal copy of transcription notes provided by Nicolas Pas. The CVN appeared on a protest call for a February 21, 1969 week of protest, which did not garner much interest, but did not seem to participate in much after this. Some of its members would become part of the Front Solidarité Indochine, addressed later in this chapter. "21 février -- semaine antiimpérialiste," flyer, 1969, CAC 20000529 art 3.

the U.N.E.F.<sup>76</sup> -- commented that it had "become difficult to mobilizes the masses for Vietnam." They traced these changes to the belief of some that the start of negotiations indicated a Vietnamese victory, but most specifically to the opportunity May had offered to translate the imperialist fight abroad to a battle at home. "Those who were at the forefront of solidarity actions, those who were first to cry 'NLF will win,'" the Collectif remarked, "saw on the spot [in May] the hope of brin[ing home] the fight to the repressive social regime that had brought about [...] one after the other, the wars of oppresion and the massacres in Asia and in Africa." The former militants for Vietnam, the Collectif explained, "were and still are occupied elsewhere [in France], believing nevertheless that the fight is one and the same."<sup>77</sup> Militants had abandoned the fight for the future of Vietnam in favor of a fight for the future of France.

A small but dedicated number of activists, however, pushed constantly to get the French left to realize the possibility and necessity of fighting for the Vietnamese as well as for the French. The Collectif Intersyndical insisted that "if what is happening in France, in Europe, in Latin America, and in the United States shows that it has become possible to attack the enemy from the inside, with objectives and means that we would not have thought possible only a year ago, it is nevertheless true that international fights remain just as important." They noted the danger of de Gaulle's more Atlantic position, and argued that "those who fought for Vietnam did so for clearly expressed motives. Those motives have not changed."<sup>78</sup> Attempting to mobilize participants for a November

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<sup>76</sup> Letter, UNEF Secretariat Permanent to Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire, Paris 15 janvier 1972. CAC 20000529 art 3.

<sup>77</sup> Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire, "Solidarité -- Le Vietnam 1969," January 1969. CAC 20000529 art 3.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

22, 1968 protest intended to sync up with a same-date American action, the U.G.E. leadership reminded militants that they had "A POLITICAL OBLIGATION TO EFFECTIVE AND UNLIMITED INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY, NO MATTER WHAT THE NATIONAL (or international) CIRCUMSTANCES ARE."<sup>79</sup> Noting that "the Vietnamese revolution played a *déterminant* role in the radicalization of the youth, and in its separation from the platitudes of the PCF on peaceful coexistence," the UNEF argued that students needed to return to a more activist status and that they required "an autonomous *apparition* of revolutionaries with their own slogans which, additionally, would show our capacity to hold our own against the forces of repression."<sup>80</sup>

Even more importantly, leftists pushed to regain control over Vietnam War protests from the Communist Party. The Parti Socialiste Unifié bemoaned having "lost [the] initiative" of anti-war protests "to the profit of the PCF."<sup>81</sup> The UNEF worried over the PCF gaining "the monopoly over anti-imperialist intervention."<sup>82</sup> French Trotskyists writing in *Cahiers "Rouge"* remarked that without anti-war action, "militants risk at the end becoming victims of chauvinistic deformations in their daily work." They warned that "leaving [international] initiatives to the PCF mutilates our intervention." Complaining that ignoring the Vietnam War took away their chances of challenging Soviet-style communism, they questioned "How can we ignore that propaganda in favor

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<sup>79</sup> Flyer, "Pour la Victoire du Vietnam MOBILISATION le 22 novembre," CHS Fonds UGE Classeur 65.

<sup>80</sup> Flyer, ""Washington, Tokyo, Berlin, Londres, Amsterdam.... PARIS - FNL VAINCRA!," no date. BDIC F delta 151.

<sup>81</sup> Letter, J.L. Auduc to "secrétaires de section, aux responsables impérialisme, aux membres du BF, à la commission de liaison," Paris, 12 June 1970, BDIC F delta 1081/17.

<sup>82</sup> J.D. Benard, "Note de Bureau aux membre du BN - Confidentielle (A ne pas laisser trainer)," no date but most likely 1969, BDIC F delta 1081/17.



of the Indochinese revolution and the colonial revolution in general is a privileged means of making people understand *through facts* what the policies of bureaucratic Stalinism and the imperialist crisis of 1970 mean?"<sup>83</sup>

As before 1968, far left activists derided the PCF for its too-soft protest methods, which they felt played into the government's attempts to calm down the movement in France. The UNEF reminded its members that "the PCF [had searched] by all means to demobilized [activists], for years, in order to go along with Moscow's new imperialism and the 'splitting' of the world between the USA and the USSR [peaceful coexistence.] The PCF TRIED TO MAKE PEOPLE CALL OUT 'PEACE IN VIETNAM' even though the slogan of all anti-imperialists has always been 'NLF WILL WIN!'" In the present, the UNEF noted, while the PCF no longer called for peace, it "stayed true to the capitulating spirit of peace at all costs."<sup>84</sup> Although the PSU and the UNEF agreed to participate in a multi-group protest against Nixon under PCF control, they described their "great deception" when the Communist leaders took the head of protest, clearly getting along with the police escort. It only grew when a PCF member "brutally smacked" a PSU member who "had dared to call out 'NLF to Saigon!'" As in earlier protests, the gauchistes refused to bow to PCF demands. Although the Communists obeyed police demands to break up the protest, the leftists explained that "for the militants of May [...]" such a capitulation was not admissible." Several thousand of them continued the protest on their own in a much more activist manner, "yelling slogans against U.S. imperialism and its Gaullist allies, hanging NLF or North Vietnamese flags on posts, covering the

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<sup>83</sup> "Vietnam Laos Cambodge," *Cahiers "Rouge"* 14, , 36-7.

<sup>84</sup> Flyer, "'La victoire totale du peuple vietnamien est ineluctable; mobilisons nous le 15 novembre,'" no date, BDIC F delta 236.

walls with revolutionary slogans."<sup>85</sup> While the leftists were not often able to put together such displays of anti-war fervor, their challenges to the Communist party in this area reinforced that their conception of what a revolutionary France would entail differed dramatically from that of the PCF.

### **"Only One Enemy: Imperialism!" The Front Solidarité Indochine**

At the forefront of the fight to restart the anti-war protest movement in France stood the Front Solidarité Indochine (Indochinese Solidarity Front, henceforth FSI).<sup>86</sup> Largely the child of Laurent Schwartz' dedication to the Vietnamese cause, the group crystallized both the opposition to Communist Party control and the focus on French issues which had plagued far left attempts to mobilize in favor of Vietnam. In the original 1971 call to join the group, signed by established militants such as Schwartz, Alain Krivine, Jean-Paul Vigier, Marcel-Francis Kahn, Pierre Rousset, and Jean Chesnaux, the FSI urged the French to realize the importance of the Vietnam War to their own fight and the need to retake control of anti-war protests. Their language demonstrated the shifts in identity since May. Whereas before, Vietnam stood at the forefront of all imperialist fights, now "the destiny of all the people of the world" was decided "in large part" in Vietnam, rather than totally. Moreover, instead of focusing in on the Vietnamese aspects of the war, the FSI's call to action immediately highlighted how the war had inspired others. They noted that "the heroic resistance of the Indochinese people had precipitated [...] American imperialism's crisis" and inspired other third-world fights. Further emphasizing the connections with the homefront, the FSI reminded the French that "in

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<sup>85</sup> "Nixon dehors!" *Lutte socialiste, journal des étudiants socialistes unifiés*, 14 March 1969.

<sup>86</sup> The group's name reflects the extension of American war activities into Laos and Cambodia in 1971.

Europe, solidarity with the Vietnamese people played an important role in the development of struggles in Germany as well as in Italy, and in the May '68 movement in France."<sup>87</sup>

Having underlined that this showed a symbiotic relation between support for and participation in fighting anti-imperialism, the FSI then directed their call for involvement not to the French generally, but specifically to "French workers," thus reflecting the change on the French far left to a focus on the French proletariat as a viable source for revolution. The FSI additionally attacked, albeit at this point without naming names, the too-calm PCF protest style. "Simply taking positions against imperialist aggression does not suffice," they proclaimed. "We urgently need to organize, in a permanent manner, political and material solidarity with the Indochinese revolutionary front, in factories, in neighborhoods, in high schools, on university campuses." The call ended by listing their causes, including yet another indication of change: amidst the traditional statements of support for ceasefires and retreats, the FSI declared their intent to "denounce and to cause the end of all direct and indirect complicity of our government" and to "organize in France a fight against businesses which feed the American war machine."<sup>88</sup> This new Vietnam War movement recognized in its program that French identity on the left had moved from supporters for revolutionary causes to a belief that they were participating in revolutionary action at home. The FSI thus offered the possibility to fight for the Indochinese people through France-based actions.

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<sup>87</sup> "Appel," 1971, BDIC F delta 761/12/4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

The group which emerged from this original call showed continuity with pre-May movements in its setup. By the time it began organizing its first major protest in May of 1971, the FSI had gathered the signatures of over seventy names on its call. The group drew its support primarily from non-Maoist far-left militants. In addition to Schwartz and the former CVN members, the list included well-known activists such as Armand Gatti and François Maspero, but lacked Jean-Paul Sartre, who since May had been heavily involved with the Maoist group around the newspaper *Cause du Peuple*.<sup>89</sup> The FSI reached out specifically to like-minded protestors in the Parti Socialiste Unifié and the Collectif International Syndicale, and were frequently joined in their protest activities by the Trotskyist members of Ligue Communiste and Lutte Ouvrière as well as the left-wing Christian organization Témoignage Chrétien.<sup>90</sup> Conceiving of their group as an organization that would aid the Vietnamese on multiple levels, providing both political support and material aid, they organized a "Fonds Solidarité Indochine," (Indochina Solidarity Fund).<sup>91</sup> The joint material and political action carried on the actions of the CVN, which had been both politically forward as seen through its emphasis on "NLF will win!," and economically supportive, as seen through its participation in the Milliard campaign. Also similarly to the CVN, the FSI showed a strong desire to unite anti-war groups together in order to create a larger, more powerful movement. They urged groups to "link their daily fights with support to the Indochinese revolution, to create support committees wherever possible" and especially to "coordinate their action in order to

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<sup>89</sup> Flyer, "Mai pour l'indochine," 1971, BDIC F delta 151.

<sup>90</sup> Letter, A. Krivine to P.S.U, L.O, Centre d'Initiative Communiste, Association Médicale Franco-Vietnamienne, Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire, Secours Rouge, 4 March 1971, BDIC F delta 761/12/4; Flyer, no date, BDIC F delta 236.

<sup>91</sup> "Projet de déclaration," no date, BDIC F delta 761/12/4.

guarantee what we see as essential: the continuation of actions of solidarity."<sup>92</sup>

Discussing their success so far in November 1971, following a disappointing turn-out at a November 6th campaign, the FSI noted their achievements in establishing multiple "grassroots committees" all operating under the "banner of the FSI," but reaffirmed that a central goal was to "bring together the other support organizations for the Indochinese people into united work."<sup>93</sup>

Yet unity proved the most difficult thing for the FSI to find. After the November 1971 protests difficulties, FSI supporters in the Ligue Communiste deplored the actions of those who "had not seen fit to participate in the mobilization," deriding the variety of groups from "the PC who refuses to protest with 'gauchistes'," to the "L.O. [Ligue Ouvrière, a Maoist group] who consider Vietnam as too far away from the workers and not of interest to them. By trying so hard to not be a step ahead of the masses, we're ending up by trailing behind them!"<sup>94</sup> Although conflicts with the Maoists still existed, by far the primary trouble for the FSI lay with the Communist Party. Adamantly opposed to working with the far left, the PCF rebuffed all attempts by the FSI to link their movements together. When in 1972 the Jeunesse Communiste organized a protest in support of Vietnam under the theme "Youth, it's our brothers they're assassinating in Vietnam!," they refused to join their protest up with the FSI.<sup>95</sup> The FSI published their own call, noting that they found it "regrettable" that the Jeunesse Communiste would not

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<sup>92</sup> Flyer, "Mai pour l'indochine," 1971, BDIC F delta 151.

<sup>93</sup> "Front Solidarité Indochine: Compte Rendu de la reunion du 17 novembre," 1971, BDIC F delta 761/12/4.

<sup>94</sup> "Indochine," *Antidote* n 24 1971, BDIC F delta 1077/6/5. *Antidote* was published by Cercle Rouge, a Ligue Communiste (Trotskyist) group.

<sup>95</sup> Flyer, "Jeunes, au Vietnam, en Indochine, ce sont nos frères qu'on assassine!" BDIC F delta 151.

allow the far left into the protest. The FSI chided that "support for Indochina deserves the largest and the most militant unity [possible]." Proclaiming that "the current situation makes it impossible to wait," they encouraged all militants to participate in a joint protest at the same time and place.<sup>96</sup> But the FSI was not always able to force unity upon the PCF. When the Communists and multiple other organizations planned a "World Assembly for Peace" at Versailles in early 1972, André Souquière, a Communist and leader of the Mouvement de la Paix, maneuvered so that the FSI would not be allowed to participate. The move led Laurent Schwartz, who had been invited as an individual, to refuse to come himself. Although he admitted that the conference was an important move for the anti-war movement, he argued that for it to "be real success, a unifying attitude would have been indispensable." By banning the FSI, Schwartz stated, Souquière was "spreading dissent among the enemies of American imperialism." Schwartz told Souquière that he "could not come to the reunion as a 'celebrity,' pretending to forget that the FSI is not welcome[.]" Schwartz compared the Communist's move to "one of the most hateful caricatures of totalitarian regimes." Twisting the knife even further, he ended by assuring Souquière that he still hoped the meeting would be a success, and passed on "my support and that of the FSI, and our hope that out of this meeting will come concrete action measures towards international campaigns which are more necessary than ever."<sup>97</sup> If unity was not possible in the post-68 era, it would not be because of the gauchistes' lack of effort.

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<sup>96</sup> Flyer, "Tous dans la rue le 15 octobre," FSI, BDIC F delta 151.

<sup>97</sup> Letter, Laurent Schwartz to André Souquière, Paris, 10 February 1972. CAC 20000529 art 3.

In his reproaches to Souquière, Schwartz highlighted the fundamental aspect of the FSI: their ability to direct Vietnam War activities into a criticism of the French government. "The FSI has led an active and effective fight against imperialism and for the support of the Indochinese people," Schwartz told Soquieres; "it is even the only one, to my knowledge, which has prepared serious action against French firms or American firms working in France *en liaison* with the Indochinese war."<sup>98</sup> A large part of the FSI's actions and publications centered around a joint attack on American imperialism and French government complicity, and while the group may not have garnered a large amount of support, the trends their actions highlighted played into the changes in French identity post-May. They challenged the government's attempt to crack down on protests, proclaiming that the government's actions placed them in the same league as other imperialists. When FSI demonstrators at a Parisian train station were beaten by transit police as they handed out leaflets, the FSI denounced them as acting support of the U.S. and the South Vietnamese government. "At a time when Thieu is massacring the South Vietnamese population in concentration camps, at a time when the American air force is bombing the Laotien and Cambodian population," the FSI wrote in a flyer, "it is INTOLERABLE that the French police make themselves complicit with the fascists Thieu and Nixon by blocking [pamphlet] distribution and anti-imperialist militants' freedom of speech." While it was a jump from supporting massacres to blocking protestors with flyers, the FSI connected the fights together. "The FSI refuses to be intimidated," they declared. "It will continue its militant task of supporting the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Indochinese people and [will impose] this freedom of speech."<sup>99</sup> Following a different government attempt to block a protest in 1973, the FSI published a flyer cheering the militants' success. Although "the French government, so-called neutral party in the Indochinese war, claimed to block all protests[.]" the FSI noted, militants had been able to reach their political targets, "protests towards the U.S. embassy, with what this entailed of a military and political confrontation with the French bourgeoisie."<sup>100</sup> The refusal to obey protest orders challenged the French government's largely successful attempts to reposition Paris as the "capital of peace," but more importantly, the FSI's comments linked together the French bourgeoisie with the French government and implied that anti-imperialist actions such as the protest were part of a movement to challenge bourgeois hegemony in France. The protest and its attempted repression became a manifestation of the clash between the left's revolutionary vision for France and the government's much more conservative ideas.

The FSI extended their attacks on the government beyond their repressive protest policy at home, to a denunciation of their international dealings with the war. They targeted French firms which profited from the war, and they accused the French government of aiding those that did so.<sup>101</sup> They accused the French government of "provid[ing] arms[,] maintain[ing] diplomatic relations with phantom regimes (Saigon, Phnom Penh), support[ing] the economies of these regimes, equip[ping] U.S. bombers, export[ing] defoliants," and urged the French to protest in favor of a rupture of diplomatic

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<sup>99</sup> Flyer, "Malgré la repression soutient à l'indochine," 1973, BDIC F delta 151. Underlining in original.

<sup>100</sup> Flyer, "Après les manifestations de samedi, tout pour la victoire des peuples d'indochine," 1973, BDIC F delta 151. The protest which reached the embassy took place in Marseilles; it is questionable whether such a move would have succeeded in Paris, actual site of the peace talks.

<sup>101</sup> "Une semaine pour l'indochine," no date, BDIC F delta 236.



relations with pro-U.S. regimes and any moneys provided for the U.S. war effort. "Only one enemy: imperialism!" the FSI proclaimed, lumping together the French government's actions with the American war.<sup>102</sup> Attempting in the early 1970s to get the French to protest against Nixon, the FSI highlighted the French government's complicity, declaring on a flyer that the French government "ALSO HAS INDOCHINESE BLOOD ON ITS HANDS."<sup>103</sup> Further tying together the fight against the American war effort and the fight against the French government at home, the FSI published two France-centric documents in its war education series: "French Policies in Indochina," and "France: Complicit with Saigon: The Neo-Colonial Strategy." They accused the French government of using their third-world outreach to mask attempts to establish French industries and influence abroad. De Gaulle's political actions in Indochina had been bound to fail because he himself represented a capitalist regime, the FSI stated, and the government's switch to a more neutral position was not a reflection of their ideology but rather of the influence of outside events, including the May uprising in France, which had troubled the security of the Gaullist government.<sup>104</sup> They accused the French government of complicity with Saigon, of implicitly supporting Thieu's illegal jailings through France's refusal to publicly discuss them, and of violating the Geneva accords signed in 1954 by what the FSI saw as the French government's actions in favor of the United States in the years

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<sup>102</sup> Flyer, "Tous au meeting du Front solidarité Indochine! mardi 22 février 20h30 mutualité," dated 1974. BDIC F delta 236.

<sup>103</sup> Flyer, ""Soutenir sans relache la lutte des peuples indochinois," no date but probably 1971. BDIC F delta 151.

<sup>104</sup> "La politique française en Indochine," Front Solidarité Indochine, Document n 4, Condé-sur-Noireau, Ch. Corlet, 1972 14-17.

since 1968.<sup>105</sup> In their eyes, the FSI's rejection of the French government's attitude towards Vietnam demonstrated that again, the fights at home and abroad were connected. "When we say that the fight of the Vietnamese people is also ours, we are only learning from events," the FSI wrote. "Denouncing Nixon's lies is the first step," the FSI said. "Others follow: political and material support to the Indochinese people; the denunciation of Nixon's accomplices in our country: companies that work for the genocidal war, men and political parties bound to the U.S., and partisans who support the Asiatic puppets of Washington."<sup>106</sup> Participating in the anti-war movement was a necessary step towards throwing off the imperialist bourgeois government at home.

### **Conclusion: The End of the War**

With the end of peace talks in 1973, activism in France dropped away. "In 1973, there was the false peace," Laurent Schwartz remembered,"and then, everything was considerably reduced, it no longer existed."<sup>107</sup> Beginning with the drastic attention switch during May '68, the French had moved away from Vietnam-War centered protests and towards activism which focused on home. Yet Vietnam was never really absent. In the groups which moved completely away from the war, such as the far right and the Maoists, the experiences with Vietnam War protests continued to shape their activities and play into how they defined their progress. For the French government, the shift towards conservatism after May '68 came about due to its desire to regain control and because of its recognition that a role as a supporter of revolutions would not work if one

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<sup>105</sup> Front Solidarité Indochine, *La France complice de Saigon: La stratégie néocoloniale*. Document n 7Ch. Corlet, Condé-sur-Noireau, 1973 3-4.

<sup>106</sup> Front Solidarité Indochine: *La France complice de Saigon: La stratégie néocoloniale*. Document n 7Ch. Corlet, Condé-sur-Noireau, 1973 50.

<sup>107</sup> Schwartz interview with Nicolas Pas.

did not particularly want or support revolutions at home. Repressive efforts towards anti-war activities combined with a changed, more positive attitude towards the United States, which continued under Pompidou after de Gaulle left, marked the government's attempts to use the Vietnam War to position themselves as "the capital of peace." For the Communist and the rest of the left, Vietnam remained a battlefield in which their competing visions for how a more revolutionary France would look played out, while also offering key opportunities to challenge the vision put forth by the French government. The fighting between right and left, government and opposition would continue long after the peace talks had ceased, as French groups continued to struggle over who got to define what France would be. To that end, it appeared the peace that Parisian resident Michelle Merlanger said was hidden "somewhere in Paris" had indeed been found by the Americans and the Vietnamese first.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Henry Tanner, "Students and Gaullism: Use of Force to Crush Paris Revolt Has Weakened the Regime's Position," *New York Times* May 14, 1968.

## Conclusion

Writing in 1975, the Comité Vietnam of the Jussieu campus in Paris bemoaned the continual distance between French and Vietnamese anti-imperialist struggles. While activism had virtually disappeared since the peace accords had been signed, they remarked, it had never reached the levels it should have. The Jussieu group admitted that solidarity with Vietnamese had had its beneficial aspects, notably in how it provided a "subversive ferment in the capitalist world." May '68, they noted, "was only possible in France because of the militant combativity of student left-wing groups which had been whetted during 1966 and 1967 in often violent battles of solidarity with Vietnam."<sup>1</sup> But even in radical protest movements like this, the Comité Vietnam of Jussieu felt that militants had failed to make a true connection between French and Vietnamese issues. Complaining that militants consistently "practiced an *exterior* solidarity towards the Vietnamese," the group explained "Very rarely were there attempts to link the fight against American aggression in Vietnam and the fights of the popular masses in France, led by their own interior objectives."<sup>2</sup> In their view, the French had been fighting for the Vietnamese without really considering France.

The Comité was right that for the most part, solidarity with the Vietnamese did not translate into a mass movement in France that, as the Comité put it, would "put into

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<sup>1</sup> CVJ, "Loin du Vietnam, " *Temps Modernes* 1199.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1202-1203.

question the very functioning of capitalist society."<sup>3</sup> But they were mistaken in believing that French movements around Vietnam operated with their gaze turned perpetually outwards. From the start of large-scale Vietnam War activities in France in 1965, activists continually brought French issues into question as they battled over the future of Southeast Asia. On the left and the right, and in the Gaullist government, they worked within a frame of action constituted by memory of past French activities, notably concerning the colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria. Their discussions about the contemporary situation in Vietnam both drew from and played into political and social developments within France. Their dialogue (and fistcuffs) with each other over Vietnam spurred each group to greater activism and further consideration of how they saw France's identity. Because of the strong interest of the Gaullist government in the Vietnam War, protest activities offered a key arena in which opposition groups could express how their conceptions of France differed from that of those in power. When arguing for what the end result for Vietnam should be, activists in France were often also discussing what they felt France's role in the world should be. While perhaps not a sufficiently militant evaluation of France's situation to please the Jussieu group, large amount of the externally directed drive for Vietnam War based activities arose from French activists' reflections on France's internal situation.

Militants on the French far right plunged into activism around the Vietnam War as a way to "defend the West wherever it fights" against a looming communist threat, and as a means of re-asserting the occidental French identity they felt had been lost along with France's major colonies at the start of the Sixties. Beginning with Tixier-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1204.

Vignancour's support for South Vietnam on the campaign trail, and continuing with Occident's often violent attacks against NLF supporters on campus, the far right strove to reject the influence of Gaullism and communism in France. In his arguments against de Gaulle's neutralist foreign policy, Tixier-Vignancour used the Vietnam War in order to fully articulate how his ideas for France differed from de Gaulle's. Linking his support for American troops to support for a free world, Tixier-Vignancour argued for a France which embraced its Western, white heritage and refused any support of socialism or communism. Far-right activists for Vietnam continually pushed against the Gaullist attempts to reach out to the third world, embracing instead a conception of French identity locked firmly within the Atlantic and European world and placed above other civilizations. Repeatedly, they portrayed this activism as a continuation of the struggles fought during France's wars in Algeria and Indochina, and the connection showed in the prominent actions of such war veterans as Roger Holeindre. In fighting for an American victory in Vietnam, the far right tried to re-fight French battles lost elsewhere.

In addition to using Vietnam to grapple with issues of French international identity, the far right also used it to tackle French intellectual identity. Lucien Rebatet's response to Armand Gatti's play, "V Comme Vietnam," showed the right's belief that they too could and should produce engaged literature, which would help the right gain intellectual hegemony. Occident continually fought left-wing students for control of university campuses, arguing against Marxist influence on future generations. In their attempts to repress left-wing activism, they specifically targeted leftwing Vietnam War protestors. While the violent means with which Occident generally operated precluded any real intellectual debate, the continual conflicts between right and left students

motivated political activism on both sides and pushed them to further develop their political ideas. Although in the aftermath of May '68 Occident was forced to disband, the far right remained motivated by the same principles. Their experience with Vietnam War protests reinforced their beliefs and gave them valuable insight into reaching the masses, which would later be used in the much more successful Front National.

The far right's belief that France was coming under -- or was already under -- the influence of communist countries such as the Soviet Union reflected the hopes of the French Communist Party. Dominant in protests at their beginning and at their end, the French Communist Party used their participation in the French anti-war movement to establish France as a supporting member of a circle of socialist/communist countries, secondary to the USSR. In keeping with Moscow's policy of peaceful coexistence, the PCF took a stance in favor of the Vietnamese but avoided from the start taking any radical stands, neither calling outright for an NLF victory nor voicing strong support for anti-American violence. While pressure from their left caused the PCF to begin cheering "NLF will win!" around 1968, their main objective remained humanitarian and moral, rather than political, support, guided by the Soviet Union's line. They projected a France whose international role lay in bolstering other similarly-minded nations through humanitarian aid, while following Moscow.

In its attempts to establish its vision for France, the PCF directly challenged the Gaullist government. Repeatedly, they used their attacks on de Gaulle's foreign policy as a way to go after his capitalist regime. PCF politicians and activists highlighted the hypocrisy in de Gaulle's rebukes against American imperialism when he himself maintained French colonial possessions overseas and kept close ties with American

business interests. They tried to undermine the validity of de Gaulle's calls for peace by focusing in on his desire to get nuclear power for France, which the PCF felt would upset world balance. In this way, they argued that the international role they envisioned for France, and demonstrated through their Vietnam War protest activities, would provide better for world peace than the grand France wanted by de Gaulle.

In working to put in place their present-day identity, the PCF continually drew upon the past. The party placed the contemporary Vietnam War activities into a long line of anti-colonial, anti-imperial actions, dating back to the French war in Indochina (and sometimes evoking the Communist role in the French resistance as well). They argued against de Gaulle's presentation of himself as a leader for the Third World through his decolonization actions in Algeria. For the PCF, if the Third World was to look to France, it should do so through the Communist party, which had repeatedly stood up for it while the government in power was attempting to maintain French power in places such as Algeria and Indochina. In this way, they tried to tie France's image among revolutionaries to work by the French Communist Party, not the French government. By repeatedly invoking past protest actions during colonial wars and during World War II, and by continually involving past anti-colonial protestors such as Henri Martin, the PCF bound their contemporary action on the Vietnam War to an understanding of French history which placed the progressive elements of French identity firmly under Communist control.

While the PCF had been able to maintain control over the anti-war fight before 1966, it consistently lived with the fear of being surpassed in its anti-imperialist actions on its left. Like the Communist Party, the French far left envisioned a France linked in



with other socialist and communist nations. Like the Communist Party, the far left drew upon a history of anti-colonial actions to establish the validity of their pro-revolutionary Vietnam stance as opposed to that of the French government's. Yet unlike the PCF, the far left had no interest in maintaining the Soviet line of peaceful coexistence. They instead openly called for a Vietnamese victory and the violent overthrow of American imperialism. Their more drastic protest activities and their more radical slogans and beliefs invigorated the anti-war movement, drawing in more of the disenfranchised leftist youth and many of the big name fellow-travelers who found the PCF too bureaucratic and too hesitant for their likes. In this way, the far left's support for Vietnam not only pushed for Southeast Asia's independence from American control, but for the French left's independence from French Communist control.<sup>4</sup>

While the PCF kept the same vision of French identity throughout the anti-war movement, the French far left's view of France's role altered after the May events. At the start of protests, the far left pushed for a France more revolutionary than the one envisioned by the PCF, but still in a secondary role. Although Maoist and Trotskysist activists differed on the form French aid would take, both felt that rather than being revolutionaries themselves, the French would offer political support to others. But the combination of participation in Vietnam War protests (particularly as they grew more radical throughout 1967 and the start of 1968) and the experience of May 1968 led the French far left to a reconceptualization of French identity wherein the potential for revolution lay in France itself. Many domestic factors played into the advent of the May events, but the Vietnam War provided the vocabulary for recasting French activities as part of a larger anti-imperialist movement, and anti-war protests provided May activists

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<sup>4</sup> See Pas' dissertation for more analysis of this point.

with the ability to deal with violence (brought on in no small part by their interactions with Occident) and with the training to maintain and support grassroots activist groups. In moving France to the fore after May, the far-left activists left behind their anti-war activity, but Vietnam still proved important to their understanding of France. They used it as the measuring stick to determine how their own activism was progressing. Maoists in the *établi* movement demonstrated their belief in the strength of radical movements in France by equating them with the fighting in Vietnam. Those who still remained active in anti-war protests, like the Trotskyist Front Solidarité Indochine, used their anti-war activity as a means of directly challenging the capitalist French government and bolstering the French left. Participation in Vietnam War activities helped shape the French left's sense of self and provide them with the means of constructing a French identity that was more active and more revolutionary. As activist Alain Krivine later reflected, "[I]t was as if Vietnam provided the impulse for something else, and then that something else happened."<sup>5</sup> Vietnam offered the impetus to arrive at a new idea of France.

But even though the French left arrived at a revolutionary identity for France after '68, they were unable to fully implement this identity because power remained with the French government. The Gaullist government had also had its conceptions of France shaped through and altered by actions around the Vietnam War. A key part of de Gaulle's foreign policy from 1966 to the start of 1968, the Vietnam War gave the French government the opportunity to stake an important role for France in international interactions. Drawing on the prestige garnered by having extracted France from Algeria,

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<sup>5</sup> Pas, chapter 3.

de Gaulle used his calls for neutrality in Vietnam as a means of establishing France as a beacon towards which emerging third-world countries could turn. Standing on anti-colonialist turf that the left considered to be traditionally theirs, de Gaulle created a Vietnam War policy that not only placed France in the spotlight again but also stymied the French left in its attempt to challenge his hegemony.

The government revised its understanding of French identity, however, as the war progressed and as challenges from the French left mounted. Throughout 1967, leftist groups upped the level of their rhetoric and the ferocity of their challenges to de Gaulle and the Gaullist state. Several of the resulting incidents, most notably the protests against Vice President Humphrey's visits and the attempt to organize the Russell Tribunal on French soil, forced the French government to take a stricter stand against anti-war protests in France. The repression showed changes in de Gaulle's conceptions of France. Whereas his depictions of France at the start of his Vietnam War involvement offered up a country which had thrown off its chains itself and supported those who wished to do so as well, his experiences with protesting students showed that he was unwilling to let the theories of revolution he supported abroad take hold at home. The growing unwillingness to deal with revolutionary tendencies in France, coupled with the choice of Paris as the site of negotiations, moved de Gaulle from a France at the forefront of countries fighting for change, to a France more openly aligned with the United States, more repressive at home, and that overall was "the capital of peace." In the aftermath of '68, the French government moved even more towards the United States, as the French right and the French left moved away from Vietnam as a central focus point. Pompidou would continue focusing on maintaining an international role for France as arbiter of peace,

distancing himself from the direct intervention which had characterized de Gaulle's pre-1968 efforts.<sup>6</sup> The France which emerged through the government's actions at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 had a strong international role as a creator of peace, although it lacked the grandeur de Gaulle had originally sought.

This French international identity in 1975 was not fixed, nor was it the only identity at play. Continual contestation at home from the left and the far right put multiple identities into play, forcing them each to reconsider themselves in the light of their understandings of the past and their reactions to present-day situations. Yet while the identity which the Vietnam War helped shape was not permanent, the effect of the Vietnam War on France is nonetheless important. Through our fuller understanding of French actions around the Vietnam War, we gain a better understanding of how France developed in the key post-colonial period following the end of the Algerian War. Studying Vietnam War protests sheds light on the emergence of the May 1968 events. It shows the foreign factors which provided the impetus for change at home. It highlights the importance of internationally focused social protest movements to French identity during the years between the French-centric events of the Algerian War and 1968. By bringing out the dynamic, dialogic way in which interacting groups debated and changed ideas of French identity through their actions around the Vietnam War, this dissertation has demonstrated the multi-faceted aspects of national identity creation and highlighted the connections between 1960s France and the international world. Our examination of

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<sup>6</sup> Laurent Cesari, "Le président Georges Pompidou et la guerre du Vietnam (1969-1974)" in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973*, ed. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse: 179-192.

the centrality of the Vietnam War to France in the 1960s makes it clear that, as Sartre had said, Vietnam was fighting for the French.

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